

"Marvel not that I say unto thee,  
Ye must be born from above."

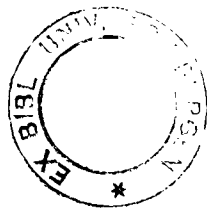
CONVERSION - A Comparison of the Results  
formulated by recent American Psychology of  
Religion with the Teaching and Experience of  
the New Testament.

*Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.*

by

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## Chapter I.

## The Aim and Method of American Psychology of Religion.

Religion is mainly studied from three angles. It is studied by the Philosophy of Religion, the History of Religion, and the Psychology of Religion. We are, here, chiefly concerned with the last of these three. Religious psychology is regarded by some psychologists as being out of its swaddling clothes, but recently. This is somewhat of a mistake for religious psychology has been functioning in various forms for many centuries. Its work was formerly done as a minor part of Philosophy and Theology.<sup>1</sup> The philosophical reflection of the Upanishads and Vedas on the Brahman and Devas included a psychological point of view. The History of Religion indicates that the Greek Religion was not devoid of psychological elements. The 'Confessions' of St. Augustine clearly indicates that religious psychology had found a place in his theology. Since that time its functioning is evident in much of philosophy and theology. However, it was only during the last decade of the nineteenth century that religious psychology ventured to

1. That modern psychology also recognizes this ancestry is seen from the following interesting quotation from the work of a leading psychologist, who says, 'Psychology is the daughter of Philosophy, and has been so long and carefully chaperoned by her mother that the notion of her appearing full-grown in an assembly of the sciences is a trifle disconcerting to those of the older generations who had a nodding acquaintance with the family, and mystifying to those who, knowing the Philosophy family only by sight or by repute, had always thought that there was little love lost between them and the sciences.' "The Psychology of Everyday Life." by James Drever, p.1,2,

break away from Philosophy and Theology and to lay claim to a separate existence.

During the same period in which Starbuck began work as a psychologist on a critical investigation of conversion, Höffding wrote his treatise on psychology of religion which was included in his work called, "The Philosophy of Religion." The difference is that in the case of Starbuck, the work was done not as a part of philosophy of religion but as a scientific investigation in the field of psychology.

While he was still an undergraduate student in Harvard University, Starbuck had an interest in investigating religious ideas and experiences. The first recorded evidence of the development of this interest is the fact that in 1890 he read a paper on the subject before the Indiana College Association. After more investigation and further elaboration, he presented his views in two lectures to the Harvard Religious Union, during the years 1894 and 1895. These lectures were later expanded and published in the American Journal of Psychology, but not before Leuba had published, in the same periodical, the results of his investigations on the subject of conversion. Leuba's published article appeared in the October number of the American Journal of Psychology, and in the January number, 1897, the first article by Starbuck was published. That these American men were working at the same subject during the same

period is easily explained by the fact that they were both post-graduate students under Professor G. Stanley Hall of Clark University, a psychologist who had a keen interest in religion and encouraged his students to undertake its study in a scientific manner. Other psychologists realised the richness and the possibilities of the field and soon turned their attention to it; among these perhaps the best known is Professor William James.

Modern Psychology of Religion, from the very beginning has sought to be a science. That we may understand the aims and methods of psychology of religion, it is necessary to inquire into the aims and methods of general science. Science aims to aid man in meeting a prevalent and universal need, namely that of understanding and reacting wisely to his environment. Knowledge to this end is secured by a study of the objects of past and present experience. Man cannot know how to react to nature unless he knows how nature has acted and is acting. He cannot know this, unless observations of the facts have been made and the observations have been formulated into laws and described in communicable terms. According to one scientist, the nature of science is determined by two fundamental needs - 'prediction and communication'.<sup>1</sup> Though science may be largely dominated and determined in its nature by these

1. The Religious Consciousness, James B. Pratt, p.23.

fundamental needs of man, yet its motives are not entirely utilitarian. It is also moved by what psychology calls the 'instinct of curiosity'. Man is driven forward in his scientific efforts by his desire to know for knowing's sake.

The scientific method is three-fold. The first work of the scientist is to observe, examine and analyse the fact, which is the object of science, that he may describe the particular object. The next step is from the particular to the general. The scientist undertakes to generalise his description or to formulate it into a general law. That which is observed and described as the particular will be useless unless it is verifiable in general experience. That which is discovered true of the particular must also be verifiable in another particular case, or in any number of cases which may be encountered in experience. Thus the second step in the method of science becomes the formulation of the general law of 'general description', as some scientists call it. The third step is that of making a causal explanation. In science, since the days of Hume, a causal explanation is not an endeavour to explain the nature of the object of scientific consideration, except as it is an explanation of the fact of the regular and uniform connection between phenomena. Thus explanation merely consists in the application of a generalised law to the particular case which is being considered. Hence a great deal



of scientific explanation of to-day consists in the classification of particular cases under their general groups or pointing out that they are explained by this or that general law. Hence we can see that description is the chief method of science. Thus the chief work of science is to describe the fact and to give advice. In the absolute sense this should amount to a prediction. The communication of science informs us what to expect, how the scientific object will act when we come upon it or it becomes a fact in our experience. In fact, science, by its very nature, is limited to data which are derived from human experience. A fact of science is unverifiable unless it be a fact related to human experience. It would be useless unless it could be verified in the experience of the one to whom it is communicated. Indeed it would be uncommunicable unless it were related in some way to the experience of the one to whom it was to be communicated. It would be impossible to communicate to a savage, who had never seen fire, and who knew nothing of its properties, the general law that a red hot iron would do injury to any part of his body coming in contact with it.

The experience of man seems to be made up of detached portions. Human experience, as one writer aptly suggests, resembles not so much an island as an archipelago. It does not run along in an even tenor, with every step of the experience

clearly discernible and easily explained. There are breaks in it, or, at least, there appear to be breaks. Sometimes the gaps are narrow and easily bridged over by the scientist, others are wide and the bridging-over process is not so easily accomplished. In any case, it must be bridged over, either by knowledge drawn from his own, or some other field of science, or by hypotheses contributed by him to function as a bridge for the chasm. Natural science in attaining its ends and carrying out its methods is in grave danger of using metaphysical means and doing that which it so severely criticises in philosophy and theology, i.e. using unverifiable hypotheses. No hypothesis can become a part of truly scientific knowledge which is not verifiable in human experience, for it cannot be proved to be the only available solution for the problem. It may be a working hypothesis until it is verified but, before verification it can not be assured of a more paramount position in scientific knowledge on a strictly scientific basis.

If the aims and methods of science be interpreted in a rigid manner, there is really no place in science for a natural science such as psychology and likewise its child psychology of religion. For it is impossible for psychology to give absolutely exact and certain prediction. Other sciences would also be despaired of, if such were to be the interpretation of the aims and method of science; only pure

mathematics would satisfy the test. Thus psychology may be admitted, but not as an exact science. Psychology has a work to do and must be allowed to do it. It will describe its observations that they may be communicated to others, i.e. it will formulate them into general empirical laws. It will explain the particular case by the general law. It will use physiology often as a means of explaining the psychical activity of the mind. It will use means to bridge over the gaps which occur in the psychical experience of man and will attempt to explain it as a connected whole. Thus psychology in its study of the psychical realm will be able to predict with a considerable degree of certainty. We can see from this consideration of the aim and method of science that psychology as a science, renders its service not as an absolutely accurate science predicting and communicating but in the humbler position of a descriptive science.

Understanding psychology in this way, it is only to be expected that we shall find psychology of religion regarding its task as that of describing the workings of the human mind in its religious activity and interests. It means to maintain the aims and to use the methods of psychology, in short it seeks to be a science as its name implies. This is the American scientific attitude toward the psychology of

religion.<sup>1</sup> Religion as a part of human experience is the field of investigation. This scientific attitude toward psychology of religion was the one taken by Starbuck, Leuba, James, Coe, and Pratt as well as by many others who were their collaborators, and by men who have since done valuable work in the field of religion. It aims at nothing metaphysical or transcendental. The metaphysical work is to be left to the philosopher and the transcendental analysis to the theologian.<sup>2</sup> The aim of general psychology of religion is to describe ('describe' being used in the sense we have heretofore explained) the religious experience of man.

The aim of psychology of religion does not differ in its investigation of conversion. Conversion is a fact of human experience to be investigated, described, generalized and explained, that the facts of the analysis may be communicated

1. There are many Americans who have not held to this purely scientific line of investigation in psychology of religion. Among them, is Professor James H. Snowden (A) who approached the study of religion on the accepted basis of philosophical theism and Christian faith. His aim was to throw the light of psychological elucidation on Christian faith and life. His work is a practical exposition rather than a critical investigation. One writer (B) on the subject has undertaken what he calls 'a scientific investigation of the cataclysmic phenomena of Christianity'. It is an analysis on a transcendental basis. Beside these, many popular books have been written on the subject of religious psychology.

(A) The Psychology of Religion, by James H. Snowden, 1917

(B) The Psychology of the Christian Life, by H.E. Warner, 1912.

2. The Religious Consciousness, James B. Pratt, p.38ff.

to others.

Conversion has been regarded by the individual Christian as a personal and sacred, inner experience of the soul, of invaluable worth to the life and character.

How then is psychology to investigate, describe, compare and generalize or formulate laws about such a personal experience? The task is not as simple as a cursory scrutiny of it might lead one to conclude. On approaching the task, certain difficulties immediately confront the psychologist. The chief difficulty is that of securing material that will enable him to employ the scientific method and attain his aim.

Two methods of securing material have been in general use among the American psychologists. The first of these is an investigation of the individual conversion experience as it is portrayed in autobiographies, letters and other personal and spontaneous expressions of religious persons. The second is the questionnaire method. It consists in securing answers to certain definite questions.

Leuba included in his data autobiographies and memoirs of successful evangelists secured from religious periodicals and books. He sent out a short questionnaire, to persons who were known to have experienced conversion. He held private interviews, whenever possible, and made a record, at the time, of the information secured. He expected to find the descriptions

of the conversion to be more or less after a classical pattern furnished by some of the famous experiences, but such was not the case. Only a small percentage of the answers were written in terms of the phraseology used in revival meetings and city missions. These were rejected because they contained little of the personal experiences of the individual. This psychologist found that most of the cases gave internal evidence of an earnest effort to describe accurately an experience to which more than usual significance was attached. The fruitfulness of the questionnaire was hindered by a lack of confidence, on the part of some people, in the usefulness of psychology in the study of religion and by the difficulty which the person of average culture and introspective power had in trying to relate his religious experiences.

Starbuck depended chiefly upon the questionnaire as a means of securing material for his investigation. He began his work with the intention of making large use of biographies and autobiographies in books, but he found them disappointing and lacking in description of certain phases of the experiences. He abandoned this method and only included three biographies, those of Whitfield, Fox and Peter Cartwright. His investigation was mainly confined to American Protestants of the period in which he did his work. This limitation was made, that the records might be more comparable, because written under somewhat similar circumstances, "as regards questions, questioner

and purpose." Hence he made an attempt to bring together data which were sufficiently homogeneous in point of time, place and circumstances, to lend themselves to a comparative study. The larger part of the data was secured by sending the questionnaires to people and asking them to answer the questions! The psychologist desired not only that the answers should be fairly homogeneous, but that they should give a true picture of conversion in a modern Christian community. That this might be accomplished, no preference was given to professions, educational advantages, social standing or church affiliations. An attempt was made to investigate conversion in all conditions of modern life. Not only sudden and striking transformations but quiet and seemingly unemotional experiences were investigated. If the individual believed that the event represented a real turning point or the beginning of a new life, this was thought to be sufficient reason for making critical investigation of his experience.

Coe was extremely careful to secure authentic data. He used the questionnaire, but he used it with more safeguards than any of the others. The question list which he used was so constructed that the answers should not merely record

1. Limitation of space prevents us from presenting any of the question lists used by these psychologists. They are to be found in their published works as follows:-

- (A) Leuba, American Journal of Psychology, vol. VII, p. 371.
- (B) Starbuck, The Psychology of Religion, p. 23. p. 184f.
- (C) Coe, The Spiritual Life, p. 261ff.

certain facts, but that as far as was possible they should reflect the personality of the individual making the response. The responses were 'followed up' by personal interviews in order that more data might be secured on doubtful points and that the individual might be observed for the purpose of securing objective data in regard to his general temperament. The psychologist was aided in these observations by a carefully prepared list of 'temperamental manifestations' that he might not overlook any of the temperamental data. The observations were not confined to private interviews between the psychologist and the individual, but were supplemented by observation of the individuals as students in the college classroom and in their ordinary college life. Friends added to the information by observing the temperament of the individuals whose experience was being investigated. With few exceptions, the cases were those of college students, who had had the advantage of positive moral and religious training.

James does not employ the questionnaire method, for he had access to all the published work of Leuba, Starbuck and Coe; beside this, he had the use of all Starbuck's manuscript material.<sup>1</sup> The work of the questionnaire had been done; if any profitable results had been attained through it, they were available for this eminent psychologist, without his doing the spade work anew. Beside making a study of the data

1. James' "Varieties", Preface p.VI.



gathered by others, James made a careful investigation of the conversion experiences of many of the religious leaders of the Christian era. He does not confine this investigation to any country or limit it to any period. Catholics as well as Protestants are included. His interest centres in the phenomena of sudden conversion. It is to an investigation, description and explanation of these exceptionally interesting phenomena that he has given his attention.

Pratt sought his data in non-Christian as well as Christian experience. He investigated both gradual and sudden conversion. He confined his investigations mostly to classical biographies and autobiographies.

The general data thus secured by American psychologists have not been limited to any country or sect, class or age. While Starbuck dealt largely with adolescent conversion in America, and Coe confined his interest to college students, Leuba and James have made a more general investigation but have limited their investigation to the sudden conversion experience. These psychologists have done the greater portion of the scientific investigation of conversion.

The two methods, which these psychologists have used in securing material, have the advantage of studying conversion at its source, that is, in the individual soul. This is of great importance because conversion is an individual experience.

However, they must be classed as indirect methods.<sup>1</sup> The only direct method in psychology is introspection. If the method of introspection was used by these psychologists, the fact is not mentioned. Indirect methods are open to obvious dangers. There is opportunity for unintentional mistakes to occur when a period of time has elapsed between the experience and its being described. It is always possible that intervening experience may become confused with the original experience or that the original experience may be interpreted partly by intervening influences and experiences.

The questionnaire method has its disadvantages. It cannot be used to profit unless there be a principle of selection. If the selection be too general, many will receive a questionnaire who cannot intelligently answer its questions. If it be too narrow in its range of selection, many very interesting and genuine conversion experiences will be overlooked. For instance, the experiences which are related in 'Twice-Born Men' could not have been secured through the sole use of the ques-

1. In Edward Hobson's Gifford lectures on 'The Domain of Natural Science', p.71,72, he says "The only mental phenomena of which an observer can directly take cognizance, are those which occur in his own mind; what occurs in the mind of other persons he can only ascertain indirectly through physical manifestations. Thus introspection and inference from physical events, assumed to afford sufficient indications of corresponding psychical events, are the two sources of the facts with which the psychologist had to deal in ascertaining laws and in building up his conceptual scheme of representation of physical sequences."

tionnaire. Even when the respondent possesses average intellectual ability, he may be incapable of giving a description of his conversion which will be useful to a scientific investigation, because he is unable to make a psychological introspection. When the average respondent undertakes to answer a questionnaire, the questions asked, to a large degree, determine what will be the content and compass of his answer. This results in the psychologist making his analysis of the factors of the experience in which he is interested at the time the questionnaire is prepared. Important phases of the experience may be overlooked in the preparation of the questionnaire. Statistics and conclusions based entirely on answers to the questionnaire are quite likely to be misleading, because by a process of natural selection the great majority will be received from individuals whose experience is somewhat unusual or unique and who rather enjoy relating it. Despite all these disadvantages, the questionnaire has yielded valuable information, as we shall see, in our investigation of the results of American religious psychology.

James' fundamental weakness lies in the fact that he depended too much upon biographies of persons who had an extraordinary or, as some would say, an abnormal conversion experience. His description of conversion is likely to appear to many sincere souls as too extraordinary for their own

attainment. This is a fault of method in over-emphasis of the sudden transformation. The fact that he confesses<sup>1</sup> the fault does not at all lessen the difficulty either from the practical or the scientific standpoint. Scientific investigation requires a consideration of all the facts. His neglect of the cases of gradual conversion is regrettable.

The religious psychologists, having collected the facts concerning conversion, proceeded in much the same manner as other scientists in analysing the data. They grouped the facts and took cognizance of the general relations between them, seeking to make a systematic and general description from the various particular facts. Whenever it was possible, they were arranged or classified under the general laws of psychology. This in terms of general psychology is 'explaining the facts'. In doing this they proceeded upon the assumption of general psychology, that religious facts, for the purpose of scientific investigation, do not differ in kind from other psychological facts.

I have already mentioned the fact that science finds gaps in human experience which must be filled from the scientists' knowledge of scientific laws and facts, or by his ingenuity or imagination. Just as the physicist has been compelled to resort to atoms and electrons, so the religious psychologist

1. James' Varieties, p.486.

has been compelled to resort, at times, to an 'ingenious something' that the 'gaps' may be filled and the chasms bridged so that the religious experience may appear as a complete psychical process. This appears scientifically legitimate to the religious psychologist, for he says "It is done in many fields of Science; the biologist supplies the 'missing links' and thus evolution becomes an accepted theory and its laws are formulated and used." However, neither electrons nor the 'missing links' are scientific objects in the strictest sense of the term. They are devices aiding the scientist to make connection between two scientific objects, that is, the known and verifiable object preceding the 'gap' in the process and the known and verifiable object following the gap in the process.

Science always endeavours to fill the 'gaps' which are encountered, by discovering actual experience<sup>1</sup>, verifiable objects, which make the proper connection between that which goes before and that which follows after the break. General psychology has made much ingenuous use of 'brain physiology', that the workings of the human mind might be more completely explained. Religious psychology finds breaks in the religious experience of the individual, just as general psychology finds breaks in the psychical process. What is to be its method

1. "It is always hazardous," says Karl Groos, "in scientific investigation, to allow an hypothesis which cannot be tested empirically!" 'The Play of Animals', p.62.

when such gaps are discovered? The religious psychologist may first undertake the method of general psychology and subsume the facts under some generally accepted psychological law which will afford an explanation, or he may seek physiological explanation. If these appear impossible, he might follow the course of theology and explain the 'gaps' as an intervention of the supernatural.<sup>1</sup> However, to do this would be to vitiate the first principle of a natural science, which is to explain every phenomenon by natural means. He may resort to metaphysics and make use of some hypothetical stop-gap which will serve his purpose and enable him to think-over the break in the connected experience - e.g. atoms, electrons, brain action, neurons are used by Natural Scientists to this end. However, unless the religious psychologist can verify his hypothesis beyond a doubt, it will be unacceptable to many clear thinking, religious people. This will not disturb the psychologist, so long as his hypothesis stands the utilitarian test and serves the purpose for which it is pressed into service. There is another method psychology of religion might adopt; it might candidly recognize any gaps found in religious experience and describe the antecedent and consequent conditions of them and

1. Morgan says, "When we get to a difficulty, instead of confessing ignorance and striving to remove it by scientific method, we say; - 'Oh! that can only be explained by reference to Source' - which, to put it bluntly, is a roundabout way of expressing, without confessing, scientific ignorance." *Instinct and Experience*, G. Lloyd Morgan, p.139.

allow the gap-filling process to be attended to by those working in the field of philosophy or theology. As yet, not many seem kindly disposed to this method. Professor Pratt<sup>1</sup> who advocates it, is found later in his book accepting the subconscious explanation of the conversion experience. So that it appears to be one thing to advocate a method, and quite another thing to be able to confine one's work to the application of one's own method.

The aim of psychology of religion in the study of conversion is to carry the well-established methods of science into the analysis and organization of the factors of the conversion experience and to ascertain the laws under which it operates. The assumption of one investigator is "that this is a lawful universe, and that there is no fraction of any part of it which is not entirely determined and conditioned by orderly sequence; that the laws which determine every event, no matter how mysterious, are ascertainable and thinkable, provided we have time, patience and wisdom enough to unravel them."<sup>2</sup> It is generally assumed by psychology that order and law is to be expected in religious experience, rather than chaos. Events in nature do not 'just happen', neither do experiences of the mental realm. In the mental life, there are laws which are

1. Religious Consciousness, James B. Pratt, p.40, 161ff.

2. Starbuck, p.2ff.

are dominant and unchangeable. In the spiritual life, no event occurs except in "accordance with immutable laws." "The study of religion is to-day where astronomy and chemistry were four centuries ago. Another four hundred years may restore to law the soul of man, with all its hopes, aspirations and yearnings."<sup>1</sup> The ultimate aim of psychology of religion has been well stated by one of its pioneers, in the words: "The business of the psychology of religion is to bring together a systematized body of evidence which shall make it possible to comprehend new regions in the spiritual life of man, and to read old dogmas in larger and fresher terms."<sup>1</sup> In short, psychology of religion aims to be a co-worker with philosophy of religion and theology. This may not be the aim<sup>2</sup> of all the psychologists investigating religion, but it is the evident aim of the group which made the study of conversion which we are examining. Psychology of Religion aims to aid evangelical theology in the field of religious education. It desires to

1.Starbuck, p.2ff.

2.There is a branch of American Psychology of Religion which has an aim different from the one stated above. Professor Ames may be regarded as a typical member of this school of 'functional psychology' as it is called. According to his own words, psychology of religion "becomes the conditioning science for the various branches of theology, or rather it is the science which, in its developed form, becomes the theology or the philosophy of religion." This branch of psychology of religion would engulf, not only theology and philosophy of religion, but ethics, aesthetics, logic, epistemology and metaphysics. See 'The Psychology of Religion', E.S.Ames, p.26ff



contribute toward greater knowledge<sup>1</sup> which may be utilized in religious teaching and preaching. The psychologists realized that there are thousands of ministers devoting their time to the spiritual uplift and culture of humanity; tens of thousands of Sunday School teachers instructing youthful humanity, and innumerable parents earnestly desiring wisely to guide the spiritual and religious development, and to meet the needs which arise in the moral and spiritual life of their children. In addition to these, there are many who desire to know the place and significance which a religious experience such as conversion has in the life of the individual. To such, psychology of religion, in seeking the truth about religious experience, desires to render a service.

1. The Psychology of Religion, James H. Snowden, p.8.  
The Psychology of Religion, E.D. Starbuck, Chap. XXI, also p.8.

## Chapter II.

### The General Nature of Conversion.

#### Part I.

In our examination of the results of psychology's analysis, it is natural to begin with the account of the general nature of the conversion experience which is offered. The task, indeed, is not an easy one, as none of the psychologists has treated this subject in a thoroughly systematic fashion. The following definitions and explanations, however, which may be regarded as typical, are fairly illuminating in regard to the essential points:-

Among Christians, "The goal of religious life becomes regeneration, by which unification of motives - i.e. union with God when objectively considered - is achieved." In another place the same psychologist says, 'Conversion', might be defined in the favorite terms of Herbert Spencer, "as the unification by coordination, of the parts segregated by differentiation of the homogeneous." "The essence of religion," he says, "is a struggling toward being, not toward knowing."<sup>1</sup>

"Conversion is suddenly forsaking the lower for the higher self." It is "the birth of human consciousness on a higher spiritual level." In terms of the neural basis of the consciousness, it is the inhibition of the lower channels of

1. Amer. Jour. of Psy., vol. VII, p. 313, 318, and 321, J.H. Leuba.

nerve discharge through the establishment of higher connections and identification of the ego with the new activities. In theological terminology it is Christ coming into the heart and the old life being blotted out - the human being swallowed up in the life of God!"<sup>1</sup>

"To be converted, to be regenerated, to experience religion to gain assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process gradual or sudden by which a self hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities."<sup>2</sup>

In conversion man becomes a moral self, i.e. "a group of powers united in the service of a harmonious system of purposes"<sup>3</sup>

The differences of definition are not so great as might appear on a cursory scrutiny. Three of the psychologists emphasize the unifying element in the conversion experience. Before conversion the self is not a unity. The powers are striving to attain various ends. Lower and higher ends and ideals are both clamoring for recognition and approval. It is the function of conversion to establish the supremacy of one group of harmonious purposes and ideals and to achieve a unity by insuring that the other tendencies will co-operate in the

1. The Psychology of Religion, E.D. Starbuck, p.156f, 304.

2. 'Varieties of Religious Experience! Wm. James, p.189,196.

3. Religious Consciousness, J.B. Pratt, p.123.

furtherance of the purposes or ideals which have been recognized as permanent. In this unifying process the content of the old self which was hostile or useless, is discarded. The ego identifies itself with the activities of the new, unified and higher self. The whole process involves personal choice between the lower tendencies and the higher aspirations.

Starbuck<sup>1</sup> in analysing conversion approaches it from a sociological, biological, physiological, and a psychological point of view and, thereafter, correlates his results with theological ideas. Viewed from the sociological standpoint, conversion may be said to be the merging of the individual, who has, hitherto been ego-centric, into a wider life, in which he comes under the influence of the social spirit and subordinates himself, in a measure, to altruistic ideals. Biologically considered, what underlies this experience appears to be the development, at the stage of adolescence, of the reproductive instinct, which finds a normal expression in the love of man and woman and in the institution of family life. This period of development provides the elements that enter into religion, or at least, it provides the individual with the capacity for receiving and responding to the religious impetus. From the physiological point of view, it is stated that the phenomenon is conditioned either by a new ego in which nerve branches

1. Ibid. p.145ff.

reach a sudden maturity and break into immediate action or by nerve branches which, having reached maturity, now function for the first time. Psychologically, as we have already observed, it is the higher self securing possession and discarding all that is useless and hostile to the new and higher self. In the terminology of theology it is the reception of Christ into the heart and the blotting out of the old life and the living of a new life on a higher spiritual level. This reveals to us something of the ramifications of the adolescent experience which Starbuck analyses.

We commonly think of conversion as purely a religious experience, but, according to psychology, it is merely a special form of an experience which is met with in many other spheres of life. James gives three cases of non-religious conversion. In one case, a spendthrift became a miser and the change, although sudden, proved to be permanent. Another was that of a young man whose passionate love for a coquettish girl was suddenly changed to hatred, "just as if some outside power had laid hold of him." He summarized the experience by saying, "I regained possession of my proper self." In the third case, the change was from habitual worry and anger to carefreeness and good nature. This psychologist also cites three cases of counter-conversion in which the movement was from righteousness to infidelity.



:viction of sin' phenomenon lasts only about one-fifth as long as the 'storm and stress' phenomenon of the so-called gradual growth cases of the adolescent. James accepts Starbuck's results, and concludes that 'conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon, incidental to the passage from the child's small universe to the wider intellectual and spiritual life of maturity.'<sup>1</sup> To the same effect, G. Stanley Hall<sup>2</sup> writes "In its most fundamental sense, conversion is a natural, normal, universal and necessary process at the stage when life pivots over from the autocentric to an heterocentric basis." To him, the 'pivoting-over' process is the adolescent change, and that which is commonly called adolescence is equivalent to that which theology regards as conversion.<sup>3</sup>

Thus psychology has found religious conversion in its general nature to be a unifying process, natural and normal, and analogous to other experiences in life. To this summary must be added the conclusion stated above, that it is, in essence, a universal and necessary adolescent experience.

1. James' varieties. p.199. 2. Adolescence. p.301. 3. p.304.

## Part II.

The General Nature of Conversion in the New Testament.

A casual or unsystematic examination of the New Testament might lead one to conclude that there is no single or consistent doctrine of conversion. The most important sources, the Synoptic Gospels, the Pauline Epistles and the Johannine Writings, show considerable difference in their treatment of the subject. This material is also supplemented by the Acts and the remainder of the New Testament.

We shall attempt to discover and describe the nature of conversion as it is taught by Jesus, in the Synoptics, and then examine the remainder of the New Testament to ascertain if there the nature of conversion is similar to or diverges from the Synoptical teaching of Jesus.

In the Synoptical teaching of Jesus there is no use of the word conversion in its noun-form. However, the word occurs in verb-form (ἐπιστρέφειν) several times. The most important use of it is in Mt.18:3. Jesus says, "Except ye turn, and become as little children ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven." Here 'epistrefein' has a moral meaning and reveals something of the nature of conversion. The disciples are exhorted to turn from false pride and selfish ambition to a childlike spirit. We must not overlook the sharp contrast of the two states referred to by the words of Jesus. His hearers must turn from the present state or condition to one very different. "Without a childlike spirit, the disciples, so far from being the greatest in the Kingdom, will not enter it at all<sup>1</sup>

1. The Gospel according to St. Matthew, A.H. McNeile, p.260.



The analogy of the childlike spirit must not be pressed too far, but if taken as Jesus evidently intended it, it means that there is a marked difference between the existing attitude and disposition of the disciples and the childlike spirit. They had exhibited the ordinary tendency of human nature, in desiring a place of greatness for themselves. Their desire evidently sprung from selfish reasons, as we learn from the larger context. Instead of being self-centered, the disciples must become humble, trustful, and have a sense of their need and dependence. A well-known writer says of this passage, "The context defines what 'turning' means, it means giving up ambition, pride, self-seeking, by-ends in religion, and other unchildlike tempers; it is, in short, identical with what elsewhere is called metanoia or repentance. It is through this moral change, the responsibility of which is laid upon man, that he becomes a little child, that is, born again."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus came preaching repentance. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17). "Repent ye and believe the gospel." (Mk. 1:14). Thus the sublime burden of the initial proclamation of Jesus message to mankind fell upon one Greek word *μετάνοια*. At first, we had expected to find *ἐπιστρέφειν* carrying the responsibility of revealing the true nature of the conversion experience. But in the Synoptics it is not pregnant

1. Dictionary of Christ and the Gospel. James Denney, Vol. 11. p. 486.

enough in its own meaning. It is not penetrating enough as a description of the experience. The key-word to Jesus' teaching of conversion is metanoia. Metanoia means a 'change of mind', not in the light and trivial sense that may flash into consciousness when the phrase is mentioned, but 'a change of mind' in the deepest sense in which it can be conceived. What is more expressive than the word 'change'? Life is a continual process of change. It may be at one time the process of an evolution and at another the process of revolution. Change in one individual may be steady and progressive, and in another it may be cataclysmic and revolutionary. What other place is there for a moral and religious change to take place within the individual life than in the mind or the psychic realm of the individual? Jesus' use of metanoia becomes all the more significant when we have a proper understanding of what is meant by mind. One who has made a careful study of the term metanoia, says, "Now we are introduced into the fullness of the word 'Metanoia'. Nous is the precise equivalent of mind. It is intellect first and foremost, but it is intellect interblended, in its action, with the nature behind it. There is no mystic partition dividing the one from the other. It is the whole soul. It is mind first, in the sense of perception, knowledge, thought, it is mind next in the sense of feeling, disposition, will, afterwards. The mind has entered upon a

new stage, upon something beyond."<sup>1</sup> The same writer, in a footnote, points out that 'after' in such a use denotes the idea of change or transformation. *Νοέω*, 'to see', 'to perceive', *μετάνοεω* becomes to see or perceive afterwards, hence to change one's views or to change one's mind. The noun-form might be expressed as 'the changed mind'. The Authorized and the Revised Version both translate the verb-form repent and the noun-form repentance. Repentance in its literal meaning does not express metanoia correctly. Repentance emphasizes a state of feeling of penitence and pain for sin. Repent expresses the change which brings about the state of feeling called repentance. This is its literal meaning. It is of Latin derivation, expressing primarily the idea of 'poenitentia' which is from 'poena' <sup>punishment or</sup> meaning/pain. The feeling takes the form of sorrow or regret over an act or acts, usually with the idea that satisfaction might be justly demanded. However, the act may be regretted because of its blameworthy nature and without any thought of future consequences. The prefix 're' emphasizes the idea of a backward look in repentance. This idea of repentance is a phase of metanoia, but it is certainly not all that Jesus meant to convey in His teaching of metanoia. Repentance represents only one activity or state of consciousness as being affected by the change, that is the feeling or emotional. Metanoia is concerned in a change of the whole self, not in essence but in psychical states, in attitudes and

1. The Great Meaning of Metanoia. T. Walden, p.7,8.

dispositions. A change implies not alone a negative process but a positive one as well. In our everyday life, we change from one condition to another; from one situation to another; from one location to another; from one mode to another. Such is the nature of conversion in the teaching of Jesus: it is a real transformation of self as definite as the change of the Prodigal Son, from a beggar in the far country, to a son at the father's festive board.

John the Baptist also used 'metanoia' in his preaching. At the beginning of their ministries, he and Jesus used the same form of words (cf Mt. 3:2 and Mt. 4:17.). Did they use them with the same meaning and with the same emphasis? Did they desire for their hearers the same change? John exhorted his hearers to prepare for the coming kingdom and its king. Crooked places were to be made straight, heights levelled and valleys filled. The king was to come with his fan in his hand; with it he would purge his threshing floor, casting aside the chaff and retaining the wheat. Fruits worthy of repentance were demanded, and the warning was given that "Even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree, therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 3:10). The nature of his teaching is further illustrated by his instruction to the multitudes when they came asking "What then must we do?" (Lk. 3:10) To some he said,

"Be neighborly, share your coats, give food to the needy". To the publicans he said "When you are about toll-gathering, do not require more than is due you." To the soldiers he said "do not use your authority for selfish gain, do not bear false witness, and be content with your wages." Here is a demand for something which is new, no doubt, but it is concerned largely with outward detail. The kingdom which John proclaimed was, apparently, that of a restored kingdom of Israel; one which would meet many of the Messianic hopes of his time. He did not have a true conception of the kingdom which Jesus actually taught and which he founded among men. To John, "it was enough if the coming kingdom was merely the restored theocratic kingdom of Israel, a secular kingdom, only more virtuous than usual." In preparation for its coming he called upon his hearers, "Alter your ways wherever they are amiss, for the great, dread king is near."<sup>1</sup> In contrast with all this is Jesus teaching of the nature of the kingdom and the conditions of entrance to it, He lays no emphasis on outward detail, except for the sake of illustration, but is chiefly concerned with the inward principle of life. His kingdom is

1. The Kingdom of God. A.B. Bruce, p.287.

to be a kingdom of the heart.<sup>1</sup> If the change which he means to express by metanoia has taken place, within the individual, outward details will arrange themselves. The Sermon on the mount is not taken up with details except as they illustrate the inwardness of the true life. It declares the righteousness of the kingdom and reveals to the Jews the fact that in the religion of their fathers they have not reached the highest type of religion. Thus we see that the nature of metanoia as it was taught by John was not the same as the metanoia which was taught by Jesus. It differed in proportion as their conceptions of the coming kingdom differed. The nature of conversion as taught by John, was such as would prepare for a temporal outward kingdom, of a highly religious nature.

The conversion taught by Jesus was profoundly inward, even as his conception of the kingdom was inward. Jesus took the

1. Throughout the whole of the New Testament, the 'heart' is regarded as the seat and organ of the mental life and all its manifold states and activities. Paul sometimes uses other terms for some activities of the mind, but he still maintains the use of the term heart. Thus the term heart as it is used in the New Testament is very closely allied to the term mind as we have used it. In fact a change of heart in the inclusive sense in which New Testament writers have used it would be the exact psychological meaning of metanoia. The term 'heart' is used to denote the personality, moral character or inner life in general, e.g. Mk.7:21, 1Cor.14:25. It is used thus in Synoptics 18 times, by Paul 15 times. It is the seat of intellectual activities, Lk.2:35, Rom.1:21, used in the Synoptics 12, by Paul 11 times. It is the seat of the emotional states of consciousness, Jn.14:1, Acts 2:37, Jas.3:14, Rom.10:11, Synoptics 9, by Paul 13 times. It is the seat of volition, Mk.5:28, Rom.2:5, used in the Synoptics 9, by Paul 13 times. cf. The Christian Doctrine of Man, H. Wheeler Robinson, p.78, 106.

Greek word 'metanoia' and filled it with new meaning. To the Jews, when they understood it, Jesus' teaching of metanoia came like a change from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge; an inner change of all they had ever been or believed or felt. Metanoia is an inner change. Being of the nature of an inner change it is also an individual change. Jesus' teaching of conversion as an individual experience is in contrast with much of the general teaching of the Old Testament on the subject of conversion. In the Old Testament, conversion was most frequently a turning of the nation rather than the personal individual 'turning'. Jesus never fails to emphasize the individual character of the experience. Even when he has in mind the class sin of the Pharisees, hypocrisy, he makes its remedy an individual one. Nothing shows this more clearly than the metaphor of "cleansing the inside of the cup." Jesus' meaning of metanoia was enhanced by his conception of the Fatherhood of God as well as by all his teaching. We can only understand the full import of metanoia as we analyse its various elements and as we see its relation to Jesus' teaching concerning God and man and their true relation to each other. We must defer such an analysis until a later chapter, as we are only concerned here with the general nature of metanoia. We must proceed to the remainder of the teaching of the New Testament and discover if it is in harmony with the Synoptical teaching.

The teaching of the Acts<sup>1</sup> is very similar as to the use of terms. The verb-form *ἐπιστρέφειν* occurs very frequently with a very definite meaning. In the Acts, it refers to and means moral conversion (3:19, 9:35, 11:21, 14:19, 26:18,20). As the word *ἐπιστρέφειν* implies, conversion is a turning of the self from something to something. It is not a negative action merely, but has its positive side; it is a 'turning' to something to take the place of that which is abandoned. "That ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God." (Acts 14:15). "That they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God." (Acts 26:18). It is turning from that which has become an undesirable state to a desirable state. The two states stand in contrast as darkness to light, as Satan to God. This turning can only be understood as it is looked upon as a turning of the mind of the individual. Otherwise light might not be preferred to darkness, and God might not be more desirable than Satan. In the use of *ἐπιστρέφειν* in the Acts

1. I use the Acts as a source of data in the psychological study of conversion though aware of the fact that it has been the storm-centre of criticism, with reference to certain phases of its trustworthiness. I feel that the Acts has weathered the storm and is largely accepted as a trustworthy account of early Christianity. However, if this position be not accepted by all, that need not deter us from making it one of our sources of data. Even if it could be proved that certain addresses are not the exact words of the men into whose mouths they are put by the writer of the Acts, these addresses still remain valuable data for our purpose, because they reveal the consciousness of the time with reference to our subject.



man is the agent, so that conversion is a voluntary act of man. "Whatever the causes lying behind the act of turning, the act itself is clearly man's act."<sup>1</sup>

In Peter's preaching at Pentecost we find the same inward note as we found in the teaching of Jesus in his use of metanoia. When the people realized their inward state by listening to his preaching, "They were pricked in their hearts," they asked "What shall we do?" The reply does not differ from the teaching of Jesus, "Repent ye," "Change your minds"(Acts 2:38). This is the dominant note as to conversion throughout the Acts. The Acts is the book of conversions of the New Testament. The apostles and early church leaders preached the gospel in order that people might be converted. Paul was no exception. He preached 'a change of mind' and 'a turning to God', first at Damascus, then at Jerusalem, and throughout all Judea, and also to the Gentiles (26:20). The fact was so borne in upon his own consciousness, that he had passed through a radical change that metanoia became the heart of his evangelistic preaching whether to Jews or Gentiles.

It is not to be expected that we shall find many direct references to the nature of conversion in the epistles, written as they were, largely to those who had already passed through the experience. They were written with the evident intention of strengthening and instructing those who were already in the

1. Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I. p. 478, J. S. Banks.

new life. However in I Thess. 1:9, Paul is surely referring to the conversion of those to whom he is writing when he says, "And how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and a true God." Here the use of turning is identical with the use of Acts.

In his Epistles Paul is continually emphasizing the idea which Jesus expressed by metanoia and amplified in his teaching in the synoptics. The meaning of metanoia appears in innumerable forms of expression in the Epistles. The word itself is not entirely omitted. It occurs in Rom.2:4, II Cor.7:9,10,11, Tit.2:25. The Epistles are shot through and through with what we have seen fit to call Jesus' 'metanoia idea'. Paul firmly believed that what brought men into a saving relation to God through Christ was a definite transformation. He wrote to the Romans (12:2) "Be ye transformed by the renewing of the mind." He meant, "Be ye changed from what you ought not to be to what you ought to be, by the making new of your minds." What this new mind was to be, he makes plain to the Corinthians (II Cor.2:16). "We have the mind of Christ." Again he wrote, (II Cor.3:18), "We all....are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." Thus we see that the Epistles confirm what is recorded in Acts 26:20, namely, that the heart of Paul's preaching was that his hearers should 'change their minds' and 'turn to God'. This is not in contra-

:diction to his teaching of faith, but is in fullest harmony with it, as we shall see later.<sup>1</sup>

The writer of Hebrews makes use of 'metanoia' in 6:2, where its meaning is evidently not different from the essential idea as we have tried to express it.

Was this change of mind radical and complete as we have already inferred? In answer to this question we have only to notice how it was regarded by those who taught it and who, with the exception of Jesus, had also experienced it. The situation seems to be that the early Christians were amazed by their conversion experience. As a result, they framed many kinds of metaphors and figures of speech, in an attempt to convey to others some idea of what they had experienced. In order that we may discover if they believed that a radical change of mind had taken place, we have only to notice the striking metaphors used to describe the experience. No one uses metaphors, in this respect, with better effect than Paul. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17). There was one way that a man could be in Christ, and that was through beginning the new life by conversion. Paul regarded conversion as making new creatures of men. He repeats the same idea again and again. "Seeing ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed

1. See chapters V and VI.

unto knowledge after the image of him that created him". (Col. 3:9,10). "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." (Eph.2:10). The change is here looked upon as being radical enough to be called a creation. Paul clearly states where the change takes place. "And that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man" (Eph.4:23,24). The idea which Paul expresses here seems to be similar to our interpretation of mind in the meaning of metanoia. There is no greater contrast than life and death, yet Paul does not hesitate to employ it, as a metaphor, to make vivid the profound change in the experience of conversion. "And you he did make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins; wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world." (Eph.2:1).

In the Fourth Gospel,<sup>1</sup> Conversion is regarded as bringing about such a distinct, definite change in the individual that the metaphor of a new birth is used as the most appropriate to describe the nature of the change (Jn.3:3). This metaphor

1. Whether the Fourth Gospel be regarded as a historical document or an interpretation of the teaching of Jesus, it is still valid as a source of data for our purpose. In this gospel we find nothing contradictory to the teaching of the Synoptics on the subject of conversion. If the Gospel be an interpretation, it expresses what was considered by the writer the heart of Jesus' teaching on this subject, as well as something of the writer's views. In this case we get also something of the consciousness of the intervening time, i.e. from the time Jesus taught until the Fourth Gospel was written. If it be a historical record of Jesus' teaching, as such, it still furnishes valid data.

gathers up into the epitome of one phrase what the other writers of the New Testament have expressed by numerous metaphors and figures of speech. None are more pregnant in meaning; none are richer in content than the idea of the new birth. The mind of man is so changed that it is a new birth, a new spiritual and moral birth. The idea of birth is well substantiated by the teaching of the Johannine Epistles, where the writer speaks of believers as those 'begotten of God' (I John 1,4,18). A similar metaphor occurs in I Peter 1:3.

This idea of a change so radical and complete that the word birth is used to express it is in harmony with what we have already seen in the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics. The use of the term birth is a very illuminating way of expressing 'metanoia.' One writer on New Testament Theology, in discussing the Fourth Gospel says, "μετάνοια, just as in the Synoptics, is the fundamental condition of sharing in the kingdom of God, not the word but the thing: *ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ* (ii:3). The idea of the second birth, of the new beginning of life, required for "seeing", that is, coming to know the kingdom of God, is manifestly nothing else than the profoundest idea of the change of mind, guarded against all superficial interpretations. Birth means change, not in essence or substance but in state

and condition. A well known writer, in discussing metanoia as repentance, and Jn.3:3 as regeneration, says, "We have no meaning or substance to put into either of these terms which does not equally belong to the other."<sup>1</sup>

Paul uses the term 'new Creature' to express the condition of man following his conversion (II Cor.5:17). We logically infer that he is assuming the process which brought about the new creature. We need not make this inference, as we have already indicated, his teaching makes plain that the new creature comes into being through a 'transforming', a great moral change. Paul's personal conversion was so radical, complete, and cataclysmic that it could not suggest anything so quiet, passive and natural as a birth. The result is that he uses many other figures<sup>2</sup>, but never that of the new birth, to convey the idea of the change.

The unity of the New Testament on the general nature of conversion is well epitomized in a discussion of John 3:3 by one, who says "The new birth is only a new figure which gives vivid expression to a truth which Jesus Himself in the Synoptic record, and the Apostles in their writings, have expressed in other forms."<sup>3</sup>

1. Ency. Rel. and Ethics, Article by James Denney, Vol. 11, p. 481.

2. Gal. 6:15, Eph. 4:21, Rom. 12:2, Tit. 3:5, Col. 3:10, Col. 1:13.

3. Dictionary of Christ and the Gospel, Article by James Denney, Vol. II, p. 488.

We have arrived at our conclusion, that conversion in its essence is a change of mind involving a moral change of character, from the teaching of the New Testament. Will the New Testament conversion experience confirm this conclusion? Many instances of the experience are recorded in the Acts. The most outstanding and remarkable is that of Paul. It will suffice if we take the essence of his experience as illustrative of what took place in New Testament conversion. He was a Hebrew lawyer with powerful intellect, deep emotions and determined will. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews in his religious beliefs: he rose above others of his time in his zealousness for the purity and protection of the tradition of the fathers (Gal.1:14). When Christianity gave distinct signs of rapid growth following the resurrection of Jesus, Saul of Tarsus became chief persecutor of the Christians. He seems to have considered the teaching of Jesus and his followers as the direst heresy. He says himself "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it." With apparent blood-thirsty zeal, he arrested or scattered all who were of 'the way'. Throwing into the persecution all the energy of his determined will, he pursued the Christians who had fled from Jerusalem. It was while he was on his way to Damascus to apprehend the Christians of that place, that he underwent a change so radical, that instead of persecuting the Christians of Damascus

he became one of them, and 'straightway he preached Christ in the synagogue, that he is the Son of God' (Acts 9:20). Here is a change of mind so radical and complete, occurring as it does in a man with the intellectual capacity and other activities of consciousness which Saul of Tarsus had, that it cannot be overlooked or treated slightly. The change was from a Pharisee to a Christian, from a persecutor to a fellow-labourer, from legalism to grace, from unbelief to belief, from hate to love, no better example of the essential element of the change wrought by conversion upon the mind in its perception, knowledge, thought, feeling, attitude, dispositions and will is recorded in the history of Christianity than the New Testament furnishes in Paul's conversion. We have selected Paul as an illustration of this change not because his experience was any more truly conversion than many others, but because the New Testament gives us a clear record of what he was both before and after his conversion. Thus we can see the complete radical change of the whole man, which the New Testament teaches conversion to be, splendidly exemplified in Paul's conversion.

#### Comparison of Psychology and New Testament.

Psychology has found conversion to be an experience which may occur psychologically in many non-religious phases of life. In the New Testament conversion is strictly a moral and



religious experience which has its psychological phases. It is not strange that we find this difference, for the New Testament is primarily concerned with the teaching and experience of the Christian religion.

There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that conversion is other than a normal experience in its essence. Persons who have experienced it may have their peculiarities and idiosyncrasies; it may have its concomitants which have an abnormal aspect but the experience in its essence is a normal one. This is in agreement with Psychology of Religion. The essential subjective process of the New Testament is the 'change of mind' or change of the inner self as some see fit to interpret it. Psychology expresses the subjective process as 'a unification of motives,' 'a unified self' which had previously been divided in a struggle with sin, 'united motives supported by united powers', 'forsaking the lower for the higher self.' In the New Testament, as we can see at once, conversion in its subjective process is all this and more. All motives and dispositions are changed and unified in that they are directed toward God, for it is to Him that the self turns in conversion. The lower self is forsaken, a new self, 'a new creature', is then in possession of the individual. This is a higher self for it is directed toward God. It involves more, for the old has become new. It is not a unification of

a divided self, except as the old self has become new in its activities, attitudes and dispositions.

There is nothing in the New Testament teaching which limits conversion, because of the nature of the experience, to the adolescent period of life. In fact practically all of the New Testament conversions seem to have been adult conversions. In direct contrast with this is the conclusion of several of the psychologists. Starbuck's conclusion is that conversion is essentially an adolescent phenomenon. James supports this conclusion and makes his statement of it even stronger, when he says that "conversion is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon." G. Stanley Hall is not to be surpassed by others and he arrives at the conclusion that "conversion is a natural, normal, universal and necessary" adolescent process. This, he claims, is conversion in its 'fundamental sense.' These psychologists have examined the phenomena of conversion mainly in America, where the type of preaching and teaching tends to bring children to think upon matters of religion early in life. This teaching is of the nature that tends to prepare for and to bring about an early decision or conversion. The psychologists having gathered many statistics have found that a large percentage of the conversions came during the adolescent period. A general conclusion was then formed that the adolescent period must be the period of conversion. This

large number of adolescent conversions is not strange. It is the direct result of the American system of religious teaching and preaching. However this does not justify the sweeping conclusion of Prof. Hall, but it does help to explain why he sought to substantiate such a conclusion.

We shall analyse Prof. Hall's conclusion because it practically includes the substance of the others. There are two words descriptive of the nature of conversion which demand our attention: 'universal' and 'necessary'. If the conversion which Prof. Hall describes is in its most fundamental sense a universal and necessary experience of the adolescent period, either Prof. Hall has a different conception of conversion from that generally recognized as the meaning of conversion, or he has overlooked part of the facts in his analysis of adolescent conversion. That he means no different kind of conversion from that which is recognized as conversion seems certain. He uses statistics gathered by the evangelists and ministers of the evangelical Protestant denominations of America, as a part of the proof of his conclusion. The conversions which the ministers and evangelists had in mind when they made answer to the questionnaires were undoubtedly moral and religious transformations. Who can say that such experiences are universal and necessary as a part of the adolescent period of life? Many children reach the adolescent

period and pass through it without any feeling, experience or phenomenon that can be termed a conversion in its moral and religious sense. That there are thousands of adolescents who have no experience of a change of character, of beginning a new moral life, of a new peace or harmony within, as it is found in the testimony of adolescent converts, is a fact of which even the most unscientific observer is aware. It may be that Prof. Hall means that at adolescence a biological, physiological and psychological change takes place which makes it very easy to turn the individual life and make it inclusive of a moral and religious change. If that be his meaning, then we could heartily agree with him. But he says nothing that would indicate such a meaning nor allow such an interpretation. To him the whole process grows out of the adolescent self. In childhood selfishness in all its many forms has the upper hand in the individual. The time comes when a voice is heard which says, "Renounce and serve; suffering is needful to perfection, so obey; enter in the joys of sacrifice; get only to give; live for others; subordinate the will to live, to love or to offspring"<sup>1</sup> This is all because of the claim of ancestral reminiscences suggested by our heredity<sup>2</sup> All this overwhelms the adolescent and from henceforth the race, not self must become supreme. "All are thus born twice, once as individuals and once representatives of the species." What

1,2. Adolescence, Abridged, Vol. 11. p. 354ff.

we fail to understand is, since all this presses itself upon the adolescent individual as a voice from within, in the universal necessary way which Prof. Hall has described, why does the whole human race not undergo a moral and religious transformation? When there are such ideals of service and self-sacrifice springing up within and converting the adolescents, why do we find so much self-seeking and self-service in the activities of the mature life which follows so closely on the adolescent period? The change in adolescence is a very important one, but it is not equivalent to the moral and religious change of conversion.

Conversion is not a universal adolescent experience because it often occurs in later life after the adolescent period and change have passed. We need but refer to the list of conversions used by Leuba<sup>1</sup> to find that they are practically all adult conversions. It is necessary to ask two questions, and until psychology has answered them satisfactorily, Prof. Hall's conclusion will not be taken seriously by the reflective reader. How do you include the adult conversion under adolescent phenomena? Why are there so many persons who have passed through the adolescent period without any evidence that they have ever experienced conversion?

To say that adult conversion 'involves going back to the branching of the ways before which youth normally lingers

1. Ibid. Appendix.

and ponders' will not suffice. No other change that is a natural, normal, universal and necessary adolescent change ever happens in adult life, as often as conversion does, and has to be explained as a reversion to the adolescent period. If puberty was known to frequently occur at any period in adult life, no one would maintain that it was a universal and necessary adolescent change. Is it any more logical or reasonable to make such a claim for conversion?<sup>1</sup>

In one of his biological illustrations, Prof. Hall gives evidence that at times he was not so sure of the universality and necessity of adolescent conversion. He says, "new life is growing meanwhile within, and if it has vigour enough and the chitin be not too rigid and impacted, the old consciousness with its customs is sloughed off, and the soul enters more or less transformed, its imago stage, to live for the race and not for self."<sup>2</sup> How can there be any question as to what will happen in a process which is by its nature universal and necessary?

I have taken a great deal of space in criticizing Prof. Hall's conclusion not only because of his very sweeping conclusion with reference to adolescent conversion but also because I believe him to be the father of the idea. In 1882<sup>3</sup> he advanced the idea that adolescence is the age of conversion;

1. Adolescence, G. Stanley Hall, p. 347, vol. 11.

2. Ibid. p. 331.

3. Princeton Review, vol. 61, pp. 33ff (1882)

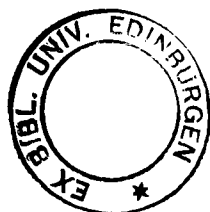
since that time it has grown into its present form. Starbuck was his student. He was also a student under James. Prof. Hall speaks of his students working upon the idea. James supported Starbuck's idea as we have already pointed out. Thus we have the history of the adolescent conversion theory in a nutshell.

The inconsistency of Prof. James lending support to the conclusion is apparent at once. As we examine his discussion of conversion, we find that a large portion of his illustrations are of adult conversions. That James had not wholly accepted the idea of Starbuck and Hall seems evident from his general dealing with the conversion experience. To these two psychologists, adolescent conversion is quite closely allied with sex<sup>1</sup>. James ridicules this idea earlier in his work when he says, "that the religious life depends just as much upon the spleen, the pancreas and the kidneys as on sexual apparatus, and the whole theory has lost its point in evaporating into a vague general assertion of the dependence, somehow, of the mind upon the body."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore to support a conclusion that conversion is

1. In his book 'The Psychology of Religion, p. 18f, James H. Snowden, a practical religious psychologist says with reference to the connection of conversion with sex, "Some have connected religion closely with sex instinct and even gone as far as to allege that it is a form of sex degeneration. Such a view is too absurd to be considered."

2. Varieties, footnote p. 12.



in its essence an adolescent experience is to ally oneself with the naturalistic interpretation of the conversion experience and James acknowledges himself a supernaturalist, "I suppose that my belief that in communion with the Ideal new force comes into the world, and new departures are made here below, subjects me to being classed among the supernaturalists of the piecemeal or crasser type."<sup>1</sup>

1. Ibid. p.521.



### Chapter III.

#### The Need for Conversion.

##### Part I.

We are now to proceed with the American psychologists to an observation of human nature, to determine if conversion be among the needs of the human soul. Does man's nature and the life which he lives make the conversion experience an essential one? Has the mind been so wrought upon by life and the struggles of life that it needs such an experience? Can the human soul proceed alone or is it found to be crying out for help, for aid from an external source, for assistance which no merely human power can render? Does the soul have the capacity for such a transformation as the conversion experience or is its state so fixed by native disposition, determined by previous choice and hardened by habit that it cannot be changed? What light has recent psychological research thrown upon the state and needs of the soul, especially its religious needs?

The state of the soul and the acuteness of its needs are found to depend somewhat on the disposition, temperament, previous teaching, and experience of the individual. It is not to be expected that a youth reared in a Christian home, with Christian nurture in home, Sunday School and Church life, will have need of precisely the same religious experience in conversion as the man who has been living in open sin and

wickedness. It is at this point that many American revivalists of the past have made their gravest mistakes. They have insisted on one mould of religious experience for everyone beginning the Christian life. The experience must be preceded by a great deal of anguish and remorse; it must be instantaneous or sudden, or it can lay no claim to being supernatural. Many professional evangelists considered the experience a much more valuable one if it was accompanied by visions, hallucinations and automatisms. Some evangelists ascribed these to divine agencies. The instantaneous or sudden conversion was taught by many as the normative type of conversion experience. They laid much emphasis upon the universal need of such a conversion. Everyone who had not already done so, must experience this instantaneous or sudden conversion, in order that the Christian life might be rightly begun. Influenced by this type of preaching, many persons strove to attain such an experience but they were not always successful.

Aware of these claims which had been made, and which were renewed by the revivalists, from time to time, psychology of religion sought to analyse man's need of conversion and to discover if it is real. Leuba finds a condition present in man which makes conversion necessary. He has interpreted it as an outgrowth of primitive man's physical dependence. In the

development of the race, as a sense of sin was realised and man gradually yielded to ethical religion, he became conscious of moral dependence. This expresses itself as a feeling of sinfulness or moral imperfection and weakness. Man realizes his inability to live up to his highest ideal. There goes on at times, a struggle, purely subjective as it were, individual set against individual. It is all in the heart of man, yet how real, how relentless, how tragic it is no one knows except those who have experienced it. The desire of the higher self to overcome the lower self, to have purity, peace and joy, keeps the struggle ever fresh in the inner life, until the idea be finally attained and the higher self rules. This, then, is a moral dualism. The great need is that this moral dualism be reduced to a unity. To secure this unity and harmony is the work of conversion.

Leuba found that many religious denominations in America felt the necessity of conversion as the starting point in the Christian life. The way this need is frequently expressed can readily be seen from the following quotation:- "What we are concerned to know is this: does the new birth, of which I have just spoken, give an entrance here and now into the Kingdom of Heaven which can be secured by no other road? I think it does. Though it seems a paradox, I believe that no one can fully know himself a child of God until he comes to

realize now deeply he has sinned....Such an experience, then, it seems to me, is to be desired by every man; that is to say, it is typical of the best, the most nearly perfect religious experience."<sup>1</sup> This is a quotation from an address made by Francis Lowell before the National Conference of Unitarian Churches. His conclusion is all the more significant when we remind ourselves that the Unitarian Church of America is not considered a highly evangelical denomination. Such opinions, Leuba discovered, might be multiplied many times from many other more evangelical sources. Leuba has, no doubt, taken all this into account in his conclusion that there is a 'revival of the religious spirit in process and that it will manifest itself in a new interest in regeneration and a growing sense of its meaning and necessity.'

Starbuck is of the opinion that man arrives at the condition which makes conversion necessary, largely through the anticipatory powers of the mind. The mind is aware of present conditions. It can also look ahead and divine what might be attained. It is aware of the potentiality of the self. The potential self is borne aloft above the present self; an ideal self is pictured, an ideal of the self that ought to be. With the potentiality of the self in mind, the individual looks upon the present self and compares it with the

1. Quoted by Leuba, Amer. Jour. of Psy. Vol. VII, p. 320.

self that might be. A dissatisfaction with the self, that now is, follows this comparison. This brings a discord between the subjective life, that now is, and the larger possible life. They are set in sharp opposition, one against the other, each seeking the supremacy. The struggle to reach the larger possible life is an uphill process. It is made more difficult by the variety and the complexity of the impulses to action. There are forces along the way which tend to cause the individual to seek the ideal sometimes this way, sometimes that way. Sometimes the individual is not able to follow the way which he feels to be the way of reaching the ideal self. One person says, "I wanted to be good but could not. I was practically two people. I would continually do things that I did not want to do, but could not help doing them." Conversion meets the need of the self in its dilemma. The lower self is finally forsaken for the higher self. The higher self takes precedence in all things and is the true self.

James makes a fuller examination of this subject than any of the others. He finds that there are two general views of evil. These two views are in direct contrast with each other. The one is called the healthy-minded view. This view is held by persons who are constitutionally incapacitated for prolonged suffering. They are able intentionally and deliberately to minimize evil. Emerson, Theodore Parker and Edward Everett Hale are mentioned as typical examples of the group holding

this view. The Roman Catholic Church furnishes a congenial soil for the development of such a personality. The individual coming forth from the confessional feels free and clean. Protestantism, in its more liberal developments such as Unitarianism and Latitudinarianism, has many who hold such a view of evil. Those who hold this view of evil are called the 'once-born type'. They seem to have been born with a 'temperament organically weighted on the side of cheer and fatally forbidden to linger over the darker aspects of the universe.' They seem to have no sense of their sin, or awareness of their sins, that would require an experience of conversion to bring harmony of soul and peace of mind. Those who are religiously inclined claim to enjoy a relationship with God without at any time experiencing any acute consciousness of sin and its attendant sadness, humility and other characteristic feelings. Thus we find that systematic healthy-mindedness conceives of good as the essential and universal aspect of being and deliberately excludes evil from its field of vision. What then would these say of evil? "Evil", they would say, "is emphatically irrational and is not to be tolerated in any final system of truth." Is such a view of evil adequate? James concludes that it cannot be from a philosophical standpoint, "because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine part of reality."<sup>1</sup> Healthy-mindedness is a sort of

1. James' Varieties, p.163.

false optimism when it is practiced in this systematic fashion.

There is a second type of temperament which is in direct contrast with the healthy-minded type. Those who belong to this second type take a view of evil which is diametrically opposite to the view held by the healthy-minded group. Instead of minimizing evil, they tend to increase it by dwelling upon it. To this latter group, evil is a wrongness or vice in their essential nature, which no change of environment or any re-adjustment of the inner self can cure, but which requires a supernatural remedy. Those who belong to the second type are called by James 'sin-sick souls.' They are also spoken of as 'the twice-born type.' It is persons of this group or type who need the conversion experience as a remedy for their sin-sickness. Several examples of the sin-sick soul are given by James. One of them gives us the vanity of mortal things; another the sense of sin; and a third describes the fear of the universe. James feels that it is in one or other of these ways that man's contentment and satisfaction is dispelled and the evil side of life demands attention. The inner man becomes a sort of battle-ground for what is felt to be two hostile selves, one actual and the other ideal. This condition James calls the divided self, or, at times, the divided will. This condition manifests itself in a consciousness of wrong living, an inability to attain moral aspirations; a loathing of the

undesirable self which seems to be in possession; a great despair at being unable to help matters; an awareness of a great burden, the nature of which the subject does not fully understand.

Some persons are endowed at birth with an inner constitution more harmonious and well balanced than others; throughout life, their impulses will be more consistent, their volitions will be controlled more by their intellect than by mere feeling. They are not likely to have excessive passions and it would naturally follow that in their lives there would not be so much regret as in the lives of those oppositely constituted. In all of us, however constituted, the chief thing is harmony and unity of the inner self. James says, "The normal evolution of character chiefly consists in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self."<sup>1</sup> This straightening out and unifying becomes necessary in proportion to the extent to which the individual is susceptible to temptations, and in proportion to the presence of instability of character. The feelings and impulses may be a perfect chaos within; these, in the end, must become stable and function properly. This is the psychological basis of the twice-born character. It is a lack of moral unity, a division of self, a dualism of personality. Conversion unifies the divided self and leaves it conscious of rightness,

1. James' Varieties, p.170.



harmony, peace and joy within.

James' conclusion does not differ materially from that of Starbuck and Leuba, yet there are points of divergence. The divergences rest largely upon the explanation of the origin of man's need of conversion. Leuba would trace it to a source in primitive man. Starbuck would account for it largely through physiological and biological conditions and their influence upon the psychic realm. James finds the source of the need in a somewhat different direction. He admits human sin as a real factor in life. It is a recognition of sin in the inner life that makes conversion necessary for man, that life may mean for him all that he desires that it should. Some men have been so reared as not to feel entangled and troubled by sin, and may never feel the need of a religious conversion. These psychologists are in agreement upon the need of unity and harmony of the inner life of the individual rent asunder by the struggle within; it is immaterial what psychological language they use to describe the inward battle. They are in agreement that conversion can quell the strife and unite the self.

## Part II.

### The Need of Conversion

According to

the Teaching of the New Testament.

In our study of the nature of conversion in the New Testament, we concluded that a complete change of mind was the essence of conversion as it was taught and experienced in the New Testament era. Now we must proceed to ascertain if the teaching of the New Testament indicates that such a change was necessary for all who desired to enter into the right relationship with God; or were some exempt from it because of natural goodness or previous religious tenets?

The New Testament uniformly addresses man as a sinful being. It portrays the human race as enveloped in moral evil and the individual as violating the law to which he ought to yield obedience. The constant appeal of the Scriptures of the New Testament is an appeal to turn from sin, to turn from existing evil to God. It is unnecessary to quote Scripture passages and yet they sum up the attitude of Jesus and the various New Testament writers toward sin and man's need. The fact of sin looms large in the New Testament revelation; man, to whom this revelation is addressed, is a sinful being, individually and as a race. Never is he addressed in any other way, except after he has undergone a change of mind.

Even where the fact of sin is not specifically mentioned, it is implied as an underlying fact too important to be overlooked or disregarded. The New Testament bears this continuous testimony to man's sinfulness and need. That we may see the uniformity of this teaching, we shall investigate briefly the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptics, glance at the Acts, give some time to the Pauline Epistles and summarize the need of man as it is expressed in the Fourth Gospel.

Jesus had a definite purpose in His teaching. He desired to awaken the individual to a sense of the goodness of God, to a realisation of his present condition, and to his need of a fuller, freer, more adequate life. He came that men "may have life, and that they may have it abundantly" (Jn.10:10.). The eternal life of the Fourth Gospel is the larger, freer, more adequate life. It may begin at any time the individual meets the conditions of its appropriation. It is equivalent to life in the Kingdom of God, or life as the sons of God. The Prodigal Son had a more adequate life after his return to the father, than he had as a swine-herd or at any time during his stay in the far country.

Aware of man's need, Jesus began His ministry by emphasizing the importance of metanoia, and by calling men to "change their minds". (Mt.4:17, Mk.1:15). The Sermon on the Mount opens with the Beatitudes which announce the blessedness

of the poor in spirit, of those who mourn, of the meek, and of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The state of mind which gives evidence of a dissatisfaction with a present sinful condition, a sorrow for sin, the sense of spiritual need, a desire for positive goodness, is, according to the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, a necessary qualification for entrance into the kingdom of God. The Beatitudes are followed by a statement of the positive righteousness of the kingdom which, in its negative aspect, becomes an aid to self-criticism and reveals to man his need. For when men of Jesus' day thought seriously of the standard set for goodness by the Sermon on the Mount, they immediately became aware of their inability to measure up to its standards. Their lives did not correspond to life as it was portrayed by Him. Their minds or hearts were not free from the sinful attitudes and dispositions which His positive teaching forbade.

Jesus' teaching of sin reveals man's need even more clearly. He propounded no doctrine of sin, but regarded sin as a terrible fact. It is not only that which is committed against men, but is always against God, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." The prodigal had not only sinned against his father, but his sin is also conceived by him as being against God. Jesus assumes sin to be a universal fact. At times he speaks of 'the righteous', but it is generally

conceded that he does so in an ironical way. The 'lost', those who are in 'need of a physician', those who are 'sinners', are terms used by Jesus in speaking of sinful man, and such terms embraced the whole human race. Tested by the standard of positive goodness and the law of love as exhibited in Jesus' teaching, all men had come grievously short. Selfishness was universal. Men, by their own standards, did not think of it as evil. Even parents who know how to give good gifts to their children are spoken of as evil. (Mt.7:10). When one came to Jesus inquiring concerning eternal life and addressing Him as "Good Teacher", he replies, "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God." (Mk.10:18).

His call to repentance assumes that all have sinned and that all need to repent (Lk.13:6). "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The call is often repeated by Jesus throughout the Synoptics. All will perish unless they undergo a change of mind. When Jesus sends the twelve forth, two by two, the burden of their preaching was to be 'metanoia' (Mk.6:12). That the message of the seventy was to be the same on their mission seems evident from (Lk.10:13).

Why will man perish unless he undergoes a change of mind? Because the state of his mind is decidedly evil, there is a corrupt heart underlying all man's actions which explains them. "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts

proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mk.7:21-23). Unless the heart be changed and right in all its faculties and dispositions, all is wrong. So necessary is this that even a member of the body is not to be valued if it stand in the way of accomplishing and maintaining the changed heart (Mt.18:8ff). The quality of the life is determined by the nature of the heart (Mt.12:35). The harlots and the toll-gatherers who have undergone a change of heart will enter the kingdom of God before the hypocritical Pharisees, who would not acknowledge their need and meet the conditions for supplying it. They felt secure and disdained the harlots and toll-gatherers. Leading Jewish opinion would have held that the present and future prospects of the self-righteous Pharisees were the best and that the prospects of the harlots and toll-gatherers, who had followed John and later Jesus, were infinitesimal (Mt.21:28-32). The Scribes and Pharisees are denounced because their way of life does not suffice to meet the need of men, because they will not enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, and because they are keeping others from entering it (Mt. chap.23). They are concerned only with outward things and neglect the inward man (vv27,28). So great is the need of an inward change in man that Jesus

is almost overwhelmed by the lack of it and of the refusal of men to respond to his call for them to 'change their minds (vv.37-39). Jesus makes it plain that this need was not confined to the Jews but that "all nations beginning from Jerusalem" were in need of the gospel of the changed mind and freedom from sin and it was to this end that he had suffered Calvary and risen again from the dead (Lk.24:45ff).

Many men were conscious of their need of some remedy for their state and condition. The multitudes flocked to John the Baptist, asking him, "What then must we do?" (Lk.3:10). People came to Jesus with similar and even more explicit questions. One came inquiring, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mk.10:17). Eternal life was that life which came to the individual with the 'inward change' or 'the new birth'. The publican who deeply felt his sinful condition and was aware of his need, was declared nearer justification than the Pharisee who, in his self-satisfaction, would not confess his need of any change (Lk.18:9ff). The need which individuals felt is no more clearly demonstrated than by the woman who was a sinner, who weeping over Jesus' feet, acknowledged her need of Him and the changed life which He proclaimed (Lk.7:37ff).

Nothing brings to our attention the need of conversion more forcibly than the metaphor of Jesus in Mt.9:37f. Jesus

was so moved by the need of the conversion of men, that he likened them to a plenteous harvest awaiting the reaping. Men stood in need of being brought into the kingdom as the harvest, when it is ripe, needs to be brought into the barn.

The need of conversion is nowhere in the New Testament more prominent than in the Acts. Peter's sermon at Pentecost brings his hearers to a realisation of their need, so that they cry out "What shall we do?" His reply is "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins"(Acts 2:38). This not only reveals the condition of need but also shows the remedy to be conversion. Similarly in the sermon following the healing of the lame man, the heart of the message was the glad tidings and the call "Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"(Acts 3:19). The result was that three thousand were converted at Pentecost, and at Solomon's porch five thousand were turned to the Lord. The messages of all the apostles, so far as they are recorded, indicate the need of the new life. The followers in 'the way' became a church. The church, scattered because of persecution, became the means of beginning a great missionary campaign in which the message was carried to others (8:25,40, 11:20,21). No one was so zealous as the apostle Paul, in this missionary



work. His own conversion seemed to have fired him with a desire that others should know what he had received, and how they might, likewise, have the blessings of a changed life. He ever sought to minister to the needs of men, declaring "both to them at Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all Judea and also to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God"(Acts 26:20).

Paul never fails to emphasize man's inability to live a righteous life and his need of that change which makes him a new personality. There is no distinction among men as to their religious and spiritual needs. All are under the law, all have violated the law, hence all have sinned (Rom.3:23, 7:7). Sin, to Paul, means opposition to God's law. In a sense all have this law, whether they have the commandments or not. It is in the heart of man (Rom.2:14,15). Man feels his need in his inability to do that which he knows to be right (Rom.7:19). "For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I practice." In the New Testament, no one has made such a searching psychological analysis of man's condition as the apostle Paul. Whether Rom.7:5ff be regarded as a personal retrospection of how Paul felt his own inability to live righteously or a universal analysis of mankind related in the first person, it reveals the same need, i.e. man's need of some power greater than his own strength to empower him

to live righteously. If it be Paul's analysis of his own individual need, it also reflects his belief that it is the need of humanity. To Paul, sin is a terrible reality. It is a quasi-personality which enslaves man. To be free from it and to attain righteousness is the great need of man. An important passage with reference to this subject is Gal.6:15. "Neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." The thing of supreme importance, to Paul, is that the individual shall have become 'a new creature'. The 'new creature' is emphasized in opposition to those who are inclined to place value upon the rite of circumcision. The question of circumcision is not the paramount issue. The necessary thing is that you have become a 'new creature'. Some have interpreted this passage as referring to Christianity as a new creation, using the marginal translation 'creation' rather than 'creature'. It seems to me that the apostle Paul refers not so much to the comprehensive social phenomenon denoted by the term Christianity as to the experience necessary in the religious life of the individual which makes of a man a 'new creature'. It is the requirement of the individual rite of circumcision which is set in antithesis to the individual's need to become a 'new creature'. And immediately Paul goes on to speak of individuals walking by this rule. What rule? Surely the rule "circumcision is useless - a

consciousness of a new spiritual life, of being a 'new creature' is everything." However, this interpretation does not exclude the broader application, namely, that Christianity is also a 'new creature' or, as some prefer, a 'new creation'. Paul expresses the idea of the need of a 'new creature' in other epistles (11.Cor.5:17, Rom.6:6). The sinful condition of the Gentiles reveals their need (Rom.1:24-32).

In the Fourth Gospel the necessity of conversion is epitomized in the words attributed to Jesus, "Except one be born anew, ('from above', modern exegesis) he cannot see the kingdom of God"(Jn.3:3). The words are further emphasized, "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The explanation is "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Such a one can only enter into and inherit a kingdom after the nature of the flesh. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and may enter in and perceive the spiritual kingdom. The need is for that experience which is expressed in the figures of speech "birth of the Spirit" or "birth from above," the nature of which has already been discussed.

The writers of the New Testament are in agreement that sin is universal, that unless man has turned from sin to God, he is in a sinful state. Man is unable to cope with sin in his own strength. It is not alone sinful actions but a sinful

state of the inner man that confronts him in his efforts. Sin has its seat in the heart or mind of man. The mind is the organ of the personality. If the faculties and the dispositions of the mind be corrupt because of sin, the need is that there be a complete change of mind that the attitudes and dispositions be changed from a sinful state with a tendency to sinful actions, to a state of positive goodness and dispositions of the mind able to produce good actions. The New Testament teaches that such a need is universal.

The similarities between modern psychological conclusions and those of the New Testament on this subject are quite marked. Leuba finds a universal need of conversion, if men are to attain moral unity of self. Starbuck finds conversion, in its various types, meeting man's need that the 'higher' self and the 'larger life' may be attained. James described and gave examples of men who never had a religious experience which they thought of as a conversion, and they had never felt the need of such an experience. Some of these men lived in a relationship with God which satisfied their religious desires. The other and much larger class have need of a second birth or conversion experience that they may be free from sin-worry and live a larger, happier, and more harmonious life. Sin is the cause of their lack of harmony, their unhappiness, their divided self. Conversion is the cure.

As is always the case, the New Testament terms differ from the ones used by psychology. The New Testament expresses a need of a changed mind, a turning from one state to another, a new creature, a birth from above; these, as we have seen, all express the same idea. The need of moral unity, of a higher self is psychology's way of saying that the self is not all that it ought to be.

James differs most from and approaches closest to the New Testament. He differs from it in finding that certain people seemingly have no need of conversion. He approaches closest to it in his analysis of the twice-born type. His analysis of the divided self has a very close resemblance to the condition of the self described by the apostle Paul (Rom. 7:14-25) indeed I feel that one would only need to cast the words of Paul into modern psychological language and one would have a splendid example of the divided self. Sin and the inability of self to cope with it was the cause of Paul's condition. James found the same cause when he made his analysis. The dualism described by Leuba and the struggle of the lower and higher self by Starbuck have a resemblance to Paul's experience. However, sin is not definitely shown to be a primary factor as it is in the New Testament and in James' analysis.

## Chapter 1V.

### The Antecedents of Conversion.

#### Part 1.

In the first section of this chapter there are two topics which are central; the motives and forces leading to conversion and the pre-conversion experiences which psychologically prepared the way for conversion.

The motive which prompts any act is of significant importance. A knowledge of it aids in understanding and explaining the act itself. This is no less true of the motives and forces which underlie a religious awakening or a moral change. Psychology<sup>1</sup> has sought to observe and classify the forces that are at work preceding conversion, their relative importance and prominence and how they may vary with age and sex. These motives and forces are readily classified as subjective and objective. The subjective forces are one and one-half times more frequent than the objective forces.

When motives are analysed from the standpoint of their relation to the self, we find that twenty per cent. of all the forces and motives are self-regarding. Among the most prominent of the self-regarding motives are fear of death and hell. One respondent says, "Had I died I had no hope, only eternal loss." Sometimes fear had an affective result; the

1. Starbuck, Chap. I.

terrors of hell were dwelt on, at a revival, until I became so scared I cried." Some persons had been prompted to seek conversion that they might win the approval of others. Children sought the experience because parents desired it and suggested it to them. One person desired to attain the converted state that, at death, she might be assured of a reunion with her father who had recently died. While other respondents expressed a desire to attain the experience for the benefits the self would acquire through it.

The other group of subjective forces is comprised of altruistic and ideal motives. A number of the individuals of this group desired to be able to exert a proper influence upon others. A number of individuals were lured on by a desire to do more good in the world. Many individuals were moved by a feeling of duty, by a desire to control anger and passion, while others yearned for life on a higher plane. The number of the groups who were following out a moral ideal is larger than those who were chiefly prompted by remorse and conviction of sin.

Forty-two per cent. of the total number were influenced to seek conversion by objective forces. These objective forces consist mainly of response to teaching, urging and social pressure. Of the groups in which objective forces are paramount, 'imitation' and 'social pressure' are much larger

than 'response to teaching'.

There are a few points in the relative prominence of the different forces and motives which deserve emphasis. The distinctly moral motives form a larger group than the self-centred motives. The active work of both these groups of motives indicate that persons are not only prompted by altruism and drawn by ideal considerations, but that some are affected by egoistic motives and driven by instinctive feelings.

Starbuck takes great care in comparing 'fear of hell' and 'conviction for sin' with 'hope of heaven' and 'love of God and Christ'. He regards these as central tenets in Christian theology and suggests that they might be expected to be about equal as incentives. However, fears appear to be present about fifteen times as often as hope of heaven. It is emphasized that love of God and Christ is only mentioned in a very small percentage of the cases.

This psychologist concludes that we can readily "see what a small part rational considerations play in conversion as compared with instinctive forces." We should recall at this point that Starbuck's observation is almost entirely concerned with a study of adolescent conversion, and that many of the cases are of very young converts. Keeping in mind his conclusion, let us notice how the motives range according to the variation of the age. The youngest converts are most



frequently influenced by objective forces. Imitation of the example of others is the most prominent force among youngest converts. Social pressure, which has the highest percentage of any motive or force, is found next in the age series. The remainder of the series is in the following order: conviction of sin; fear of death and hell; response to teaching; following out a moral ideal; altruistic motives. This examination of the relation of age to motives and forces indicates that the psychologist is only justified in concluding that, when conversion occurs in adolescence, the motives or forces yielding an influence may be determined, to a large degree, at least, by the stage of development of the adolescents' mental powers. Objective forces are likely to be found most prominent in early conversions, and fears may be a concomitant. When the cases are those of older converts, rational considerations and higher subjective motives more frequently dominate.

It is not surprising that Starbuck found that love of God and Christ was present on only two per cent. of the cases. When a person truly loves God or Christ, he is a Christian and would not be seeking conversion. The very nature of the case rules it out as a potential incentive. Nor is it to be wondered at that 'hope of heaven' is not very prominent as an incentive to conversion, in adolescence. It is a fact, well known to every observing minister, that the young people do not

meditate upon the hope of heaven so much as those of more advanced years. The death of a father or mother or other loved one may alter this general conclusion, but in most cases it will be found to be true.

in most conversions there is a pronounced mental state which precedes the conversion crisis. There are many phases of experience in this pre-conversion state. However, the central fact in all is regarded as the sense of sin. The other conditions are varied manifestations of this central one. The form in which the experience manifests itself is determined, first, by differences in temperament, and second, by whether it is the sinful condition or the ideal life which is more vivid in the consciousness. The various shades of the pre-conversion experience have been grouped and described as follows:-

Conviction of sin; struggle after the new life; prayer, calling on God; a sense of estrangement from God; doubts and questionings; even a tendency to resist conviction; depression and sadness; restlessness, anxiety, and uncertainty; helplessness and humility; earnestness and seriousness and various physiological affections, including loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nervousness and affection of sight, hearing and touch.

Starbuck has described the effect of temperament upon the pre-conversion experience. The cases are arranged in two

series because of the nature of the experience. There are those who are thrown back on themselves and who feel helpless, depressed and estranged from God; these are of passive temperament. At the other extreme are those who are reaching out in the direction of the new life, who are striving towards it and praying for it. If the forces which impel these individuals towards the new life have dawned on them unawares and without their approval, they wilfully oppose the new influences and resist conviction. The members of this group are of active and positive temperament. Between these two extreme groups are those who have a profound sense of sin<sup>1</sup> but remain in a state of restlessness and anxiety, or vacillate between activity and passivity during the pre-conversion period.

The second series which illustrates the manifestation of the sense of sin, preceding conversion, is determined by the element of the change of life which is predominant in consciousness. In conversion there are two elements always present or implied, i.e. the old life or actual self and the new life or ideal self. In some cases the first is more prominent, in other cases the second is uppermost. Sometimes neither is

1. It has been asserted by recent writers of psychology that the acute sense of sin is declining and that the decline is due, in part, to the change of emphasis in evangelical preaching from special stress on sin and its consequences to the love of God and His mercy. See the Psychology of Religion, James H. Snowden, p.137ff, and Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals, F. M. Davenport, Chap. X.

explicitly predominant and both appear to be acting simultaneously, though the individual may be unaware of it, and thus the life is thrown into unrest and distress. At the one extreme in this series are the groups of persons in which there is deep consciousness of sin, extreme unworthiness, or, if the new life has come unconsciously, there is a tendency to cling to the old life and to resist the incoming of the new life. At the other extreme are the groups in which the new life appears more or less clearly in consciousness. These persons either picture the ideal life in abstract terms and strive to attain it or else they regard the experience as seeking God - 'an ideal which is afar off'. The intermediate groups are those in 'confused organic states' described as helplessness and restlessness or, sometimes, as mere undirected nervous strain, regarded as earnestness and seriousness.

An examination was made to discover what effect former moral conduct had upon the presence and absence of the sense of sin. It was ascertained that where there had been pronounced waywardness preceding conversion, the sense of sin was absent in only one-tenth of the male cases, and in an even smaller fraction of the female cases. This would appear as though the sense of sin follows naturally in the path of evil. But what of those individuals who have led a moral upright life? Among the male cases where the previous life is described as fairly upright and moral, the sense of

sin is present and absent in about an equal number of cases. Among the female experiences, described as preceded by good moral and even religious training and observances, more than two-thirds give decided evidences of 'a sense of sin'. A girl reared in a pious Methodist family, and considered an unusually good child, bore testimony that from her earliest recollection she had a deep conviction of sin, and that her 'realisation of the hatefulness of sin was stronger than the fear of the consequences.'

Starbuck<sup>1</sup> regards the sense of sin as a natural sequence of bad habits and conscious evil, but does not believe that the previous wayward life will furnish a complete causal explanation in all cases. The fact that it has greater prominence among females, he regards as due, no doubt, to imperfect physical conditions during the period of adolescence. Even the extreme cases of dejection, self-distrust, self-condemnation and kindred feelings may be traced, in part at least, to physiological causes. He concludes that "we have to look for the cause underlying the sense of sin, in part, in certain temperamental and organic conditions and not to consider it simply as a spiritual fact."

Leuba regards the sense of sin as, at times, being 'little more than a feeling of physical misery, the anguish of sickened flesh.'<sup>2</sup> In such cases, he suggests that descriptive terms

1. Starbuck, p. 70f.      2. Leuba p. 330.

like 'regret' and 'desire for relief' should properly take the place of 'remorse' and 'repentance'. These latter terms designate the experience as it is modified by distinctive intellectual consideration which, he contends, are ignored by the subjects to whom he is referring. However he includes it as an essential factor in conversion.

Pratt<sup>1</sup> contends that theology, by its teaching concerning the sense of sin, has induced a form of experience that is largely artificial, and that the psychologists have observed this experience and formulated its laws, and thus verified theology's artificial production. He maintains that there is very little really good evidence for the statement which Starbuck makes, and James accepts and quotes, that conversion is "a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving toward righteousness."

However, he is ready to admit that it may be effective in certain conversions of the Bunyan-Brainerd type, but in really significant experiences it is rare that the attention of the person is centred on his own sinful nature, nor does he look chiefly at his past. It is the contention of this psychologist that, in many of the cases examined, it is not sin that troubles the subject, but misery, and the chief thing that fills the consciousness and affects the change is not a struggle

1. Religious Consciousness, p.150ff.

away from sin but a striving toward something new. He is unable to discover that the sense of sin has played any important part in the New Testament cases, not even in the case of St. Paul. The cases described in Harold Begbie's 'Twice-Born Men' are regarded as real conversion, but 'in not a single case there reported is there anything really comparable to the conviction period of<sup>1</sup> theology' - and psychology.'

No matter what it is to be called, it appears evident to most psychologists that there is an awakened consciousness preceding conversion. We shall postpone a discussion of the opposite view of Professor Pratt on the sense of sin until we have given our attention to the New Testament testimony on the subject.

1. The pioneer American religious psychologist, Jonathan Edwards, regarded a sense of sin as an essential pre-conversion experience. He says "Surely it cannot be unreasonable that before God delivers us from a state of sin and liability to everlasting woe, he should give us some considerable sense of the evil from which he delivers us, in order that we may know and feel the importance of salvation, and be enabled to appreciate the value of what God is pleased to do for us." Edwards appears to have grasped a great deal of the importance which psychology attaches to a 'sense of sin', although he states his conclusion in theological language.

## Part II.

### The Antecedents of Conversion in the New Testament.

The conversion experience of the New Testament is not a process which just happens without any preliminary preparation or experiences. There are motives which precede the conversion that motivate men, and impel them toward conversion. There are pre-conversion activities or states of consciousness which do much in shaping the way toward the experience itself, all of which is very important and must be carefully examined and analysed.

We must first discover the motives which lead men to be interested in good instead of evil, which first inclined them toward the religious experience that gives entrance into the new life. The motives are not clearly set forth by the subjects of conversion, but must largely be inferred from the preaching and teaching of the times.

John the Baptist came teaching of the approaching kingdom, calling for repentance, warning his hearers of a wrath to come. He described the axe as lying at the root of the trees and asserted that the tree which did not bring forth good fruit would be hewn down and cast into the fire. The One, whose approach he announces, will come with His fan in His hand and at His coming there will be a thorough cleansing of His



threshing floor. The Wheat will be garnered, but the chaff will be burnt up with unquenchable fire. The figures of speech are strong and rugged. Great danger is imminent. The motive inspired, we can readily see, is largely one of self-preservation prompted by a mingled feeling of fear and hope. Flight is suggested as the way of escape; "who warned you to flee from the wrath to come"(Mt.3:1-12). There is fear in their hearts lest they may be victims of the coming wrath; lest their lives may be barren of fruit and the metaphorical axe be for their undoing; fear lest they be among the chaff when the separation is made, and the unquenchable fire be their portion. Hope was theirs, that they might somehow escape it all. The preaching was permeated by the metaphorical use of wrath and fire and the chief motives prompted by it were largely negative, namely that of escaping impending doom which was the consequence of sins.

Jesus in his preaching and teaching strongly indicated to people the dangers of indifference and apathy. Men were in peril, because of their condition; "Except ye repent ye shall all in like manner perish"(Lk.13:3). The unfruitful tree is in danger of being hewn down and cast into the fire (Mt.7:19). The rhetorical question is thrust at the scribes and Pharisees, "How shall ye escape the judgement of hell?"(Mt.23:24). This passage indicates that the appeal which Jesus made to men was

not entirely devoid of that which shakes men loose from careless and sinful ways of living, and couched, as it was, in burning words, it must have aroused the motive of self-preservation, which was partially prompted by fear. This should not alarm us, for fear undoubtedly has its spiritual value. Fear is of two kinds: the kind that paralyses, and the kind that inspires. The fear prompted by Jesus' preaching was the latter.

In the early history of the Apostolic church, so far as we can ascertain from the records, the chief motives which lead men to seek conversion was the desire that they might receive the new life and power which they saw in others. They were told in apostolic preaching that such a life might be theirs. Many were bearing testimony that they were living in the new life, freed from sin, and in union and fellowship with Christ. Men desired to be allied with the forces of Jesus Christ. After his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, he was regarded as the greatest personality of all time. He was proclaimed by the apostles as the exalted Christ. It was announced that he was coming again (Acts 1:11, 1 Pet. 4:7, 1 Thess. 5:2). His teaching was interpreted to mean that his coming was imminent. As a result of this preaching and appeal, men desired the experience which would bring them into the state of the changed mind which He (Jesus) had preached; that they might enter into this new life which was now being

proclaimed by the apostles and enjoyed by many.

That there was an element of fear connected with the idea seems evident. A fear of consequences, if one be still in a condition of sin at Jesus' second coming, entered into the motives of the early church conversion. Record of this is found in Acts 2:43, "And fear came upon every soul." What did they fear and why did they fear? Peter, in his famous Pentecostal sermon, had emphasised the fact that the generation whom he addressed was responsible for the death of Jesus. The Holy Spirit had already come upon the group of apostles and disciples (Acts 2:4). The people of the crowd were conscious of its effect upon these disciples of Jesus. They heard the Pentecostal sermon, as well as testimony and exhortation not recorded in Acts 2; of this, the central thought was Jesus Christ and His salvation. They were exhorted: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). They feared the future outcome if they entered not into this new life. The idea of Jesus coming again became an effective means of interesting men in the new life. The anticipation of His coming became an impelling motive, urging men forward to a revulsion from sin, and a desire for righteousness.

The fact that Jesus was expected to come again, and that the conversion of men would in some way aid in bringing about His speedy return seems to have formed part of early apostolic

preaching (Acts 7:20). Such a message added to the motives causing men to seek the new life as a means of preparation for his second coming and the Judgment, (II Tim.4:1) which his coming would bring with it. So prevalent was the belief in the imminence of Jesus' coming that Paul had to warn the church at Thessalonica against being carried away with the belief (II Thess.2:1-3). That the Apostles expected Jesus to come again and that within their lifetime seems certain. That some of them either modified or abandoned their views is a fact which does not lessen the effect which their early teaching appears to have had upon its hearers.

The trend of some of the teaching of Jesus (Mt.21:31ff, Lk.8:27, Mk.14:62, and many other such passages) and its misinterpretation by his hearers, had an effect in shaping the motives which lead some men to become temporary followers of Jesus. This misunderstanding and misinterpretation of his message with reference to the kingdom may have given selfish motives a prominent place in the consciousness of some individuals. This must have been especially true in the case of the Messianic hopes of the multitude. However, there is no record that any person was lead into the kingdom, who was prompted only by a motive of ambition. It is difficult to determine concerning the people of Jesus' day how many and who were converted. The disciples, who might be classed by some as converts during the life-time of Jesus, reveal motives,

at times, which are not free from selfish interests such as would not be expected in converted men. Jesus appears to be addressing his disciples directly in Mt.18:3, when he says, "Except ye turn, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." This makes clear that selfish ambition, and self-seeking has no place in the teaching of Jesus, and that He has no desire to arouse selfish ambition as a motive even though we see it springing up as an apparent result of his preaching.

The positive motives which Jesus desired to inspire in men by His teaching and preaching are very evident. He desired men to become sons of God, to become like God, to have fellowship with Him as a son with a father. He wanted men to seek goodness for goodness' sake. He wanted men to turn from sin in order that they might live a new and higher life. He desired men to be dissatisfied with their sin, which kept them from the fullest enjoyment of life. Jesus' teaching would instill the desire or motive for self-expansion in the new and larger life. The value of the life He lived and taught was easily discernible. Conversion was the means of beginning it, and through it the way was opened for future spiritual and moral development.

Perhaps in no other experiences is the motive so clearly manifested as in the case of Paul's conversion. He had a consuming desire for righteousness. He sought it with

diligence through the law, became dissatisfied with the results, and then the way to God and righteousness was revealed to him through a living abiding Saviour who was none other than Jesus Christ whom he had persecuted in his attack upon the Christians. It was the desire not only to will but to be able to do good, manifesting itself in Paul's consciousness which was aiding psychologically in preparing him for the abandonment of the law as a means of living a righteous life, and opening the way for the reception of Christ and the new life.

#### The Consciousness of Sin.

The New Testament teaches that man only comes to the new life and is in the way of attaining spiritual perfection in a revolt from sin. The consciousness of sin is one of the main factors that aid in bringing about the dual change through which a man must pass in order to attain salvation and become, in New Testament language, a Son of God. The sense of sin is not entirely a novelty in the New Testament but is much in evidence in the Old Testament. At times, it is the consciousness, of the leaders or prophets, of the sins of the nation; again it is an individual consciousness of sin. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," cried the Psalmist. How acute the sin was even to this Old Testament individual is expressed in his words, "My sin is ever before me." It was the moral law which brought the consciousness of sin to the

Jews. As Paul expressed it, "I had not known sin, except through the law."

If a knowledge of the law made for an acute awareness of sin among the Hebrews, living under the law, what caused the even greater sensitiveness to moral evil which is in evidence in primitive Christianity? Why did men become more conscious of sin after they knew Jesus and had heard His teaching? The first conclusion would be that Jesus had something to do with the appearance of a consciousness of sin, and that His teaching was an added cause for an acute consciousness of sin.

We shall consider as a first cause 'knowing Jesus.' No one, so far as it is recorded, or as far as I have been able to ascertain, was ever converted in New Testament times without knowing Jesus, either personally or historically, directly or indirectly, face to face, or through another who had met Him and knew Him. We must keep this thought ever before us for it is most important in a study of New Testament conversion. To meet Jesus was the first step in Christian conversion of the New Testament. Of course preceding that, there was often a desire to meet Him, which might be considered the initial step in conversion. Meeting Jesus is not an objective step but a subjective one, for we are concerned here primarily with the subjective phases of conversion. Whatever has any effective part in the conversion experience, either upon the activity or

state of the psychical realm, must claim our attention. What was the effect of meeting Jesus? Peter met him and exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (Lk. 5:8). In His presence, men were conscious of their sinfulness and their unworthiness. The moral life of Jesus was perfect. His sincere personality became a criterion of human character. He taught the goodness which man ought to strive after, not in negative terms nor in legalistic phrases, nor as a part of a complex system of speculative ethics, but in the terms of His own everyday life. He lived the good life He desired for others. The most righteous man could not compare his moral life with that of Jesus without becoming conscious of his sin and of the effects of sin upon his moral character. Jesus' life and work allowed men to see that He was sinless. His criterion was not too high for His own life. He taught that if man is sinful it will appear in his speech or his action sooner or later. But Jesus was never convicted of a word, an act, a look which in any manner betrayed a state of sin within.

In His teaching, Jesus gave cause for a deepened sense of sin. His interpretation of the moral law led man to become aware of his sin. He made the law more exacting and, as we have already said, more searchingly inward. Its requirements penetrated to the very source of conduct, even the innermost recesses of the psychical realm, which He described by the term



'heart'. When he had fulfilled the moral law, it became the criterion of testing the very motives of human action. His interpretation detected the hate prompting the murder and the lust leading to adultery. Those who followed Him, if they succeeded in meeting His requirements, would exceed in righteousness even the scribes and Pharisees who were making loud claims of goodness. As we have already seen, it was the law which aroused a sense of sin and undoubtedly it was the fulfilled law, or Jesus' interpretation of the law which aroused a consciousness of sin, deepened the feeling of unworthiness and gave an increased sense of failure to comply with that which Jesus taught. One writer feels this so keenly that he defines active sin as lawlessness, (I John 3:4). "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness."

A prominent part of the teaching of Jesus was the Fatherhood of God. Jesus taught by parable and precept not only the sovereign will of God and his universality as Father, but also His immeasurable love and pity for sinful man. So that man became conscious not alone that he was transgressing the law and rebelling against the will of the divine Law-giver, but also that his sinful act and state was separating him, a potential son from his Father's love and blessing. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger (Lk.15:17). Sin, then, as the New

Testament writers regard it had resulted in a breach of a personal relationship between man and God. "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight"(Lk.15:18).

The consciousness of man, that sin has come between him and God, his Father, and has separated them, is accompanied by a consciousness of personal responsibility for wrongdoing (Lk. 13:21). "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." This feeling of guilt is also shown by the multitudes at Pentecost who "were pricked in their heart." Beside this feeling of guilt, or blameworthiness there is the consciousness that God the Father disapproves of the state of the heart and the actions which spring from it. Evidence of this is given in the references to the wrath of God (Rom.1: 18:2,5. I Thess. 1:10, II Thess.1:8). Not only does God disapprove, but man is conscious of his liability to a just punishment. That Paul refers to a conscious mental condition, prior to conversion, seems certain from Eph.2:3, "We all once lived in the lusts of the flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath." Man was also conscious that sin would prolong this separation eternally unless some remedy were found, before the end of the earthly life. Death was to be feared, for it was a universal experience of mankind and it separated man from God eternally if sin persisted to the end. Death was felt to be a

punishment for sin (Rom.5:12, 6:23). This is not the only punishment, for guilt or sin is to be punished by more sin (Rom.1:24,25).

All this consciousness or acute sense of sin might be regarded and classified as the product of an over-wrought imagination, a state of pessimism and morbidness, if it were not that the New Testament makes clear, as we have already stated, that the source of sin is the human heart. With the New Testament writers and those of whom they wrote, sin was both an observed fact in the history of man and also an experienced fact in the personal life. No more vivid description of an acute consciousness of sin and of a struggle against it is given in human history than Paul gives in the analysis of his consciousness of sin.

He analyses and describes not alone the consciousness of sin, but the subjective effect it had upon him. We have already investigated his consciousness of the guilt of sin, and we now investigate his analysis of the consciousness of the power and subjective effect of sin.

That Paul regarded sin as slavery, he makes plain, (Rom.6:6) "That so we should no longer be in bondage to sin." He had experienced being within its power and tyranny. He looked upon sin as nothing short of a living quasi-personal power enslaving the life like a heartless master of slaves, supplying shackles as difficult to break as those encountered in slavery.

Paul has so keenly observed the facts, that his analysis, if it had been made by a modern psychologist, would have been termed a psychological law. He desires to do good but there is present a desire to do evil. It was as though the desire to do evil and the desire to do good were always present and in a struggle, warring against each other, each battling for absolute possession of his ego. According to the description he is unable to do what he feels he ought to do and really wants to do. Before anything has been done, it always has his consent that it is good (Rom.7:16), yet against the judgment of the inward man. He has described a process going on within the self, antecedent to conversion, which so rent in twain the self that it seems like two selves battling for supremacy, the right to rule being the prize to the winners. Before he met Christ, Paul had no solution or remedy for such a condition. The law had failed him. To keep the law perfectly was to be declared righteous by God. For a time he seems to have thought that he had succeeded. (Rom.7:7). Then he discovered the searching inwardness of the last commandment. His whole palace of success, which he had built upon the law, came crashing down upon him and failure stared him in the face. When he looked to the future he saw the wrath of God, a just punishment awaiting him; when he thought of the present, it seemed that each sin brought its punishment in a keener

consciousness of guilt. His guilt as both blameworthiness and deserving just punishment was ever before him. When he looked again within, he saw this continuous struggle of good and evil. The fear of condemnation was in his heart. The acute state of his consciousness is expressed in Rom. 8:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"

#### The Consciousness of Divine Aid.

The consciousness of sin is only one factor of the preliminary preparation for conversion; it is what might be called the negative factor. Parallel to it, we find developing in the New Testament a consciousness of divine aid. Man becomes conscious that to attain to the way of perfection he must have external aid. Consciousness of divine help in national affairs had long been the possession of Israel, but the Jews just prior to and at the beginning of the New Testament era do not give much evidence that they had any consciousness of a God who would help the sinner to abandon his sin and attain unto righteousness. Dependence was placed on the law; if it be kept perfectly, then man has attained unto perfect righteousness. Either indifference and iniquity, or self-righteousness and hypocrisy resulted. The New Testament nowhere teaches that man can attain to the new life by his own efforts nor that he can free himself from sin. No matter how acute the consciousness of sin nor how great the presence of

sin or the state of degradation, the New Testament teaches that the light of conscience is never wholly extinguished but that it may flare up at any time. That the thinking, feeling and willing activities of the personality are indestructible, is the assumption of the New Testament. These activities of the personality render man capable of responding to divine influences and aid. The operation of a divine factor is recognised throughout the New Testament as being indispensable. That which aids or assists in man's deliverance is God's free grace. It is revealed in the fact that "God so loved the world that He gave His son." That the men who knew Jesus and listened "to the words of grace" that proceeded from His mouth were aware that God was sending help through Him, is a fact made clear in the Synoptics. Just the extent and exact nature of the divine aid was not wholly clear to them. The result is that we do not find the disciples and followers in the Synoptics giving evidence of such a definite consciousness of divine help as is observable in the spiritual experience and teaching of Paul. Nevertheless the whole New Testament scripture is permeated with the idea that God has made preparation to deliver man from his sinful state and to bring him into a saving relation to Himself. This is familiarly known to us as the doctrine of God's redemptive grace.

The Synoptics reveal that Jesus enabled man to believe

that he need not despair of salvation, no matter how sinful his condition might be. The love which Jesus showed toward the worst of sinners, harlots, toll-gatherers, was itself sufficient to arouse a sense of hope. He, the Sinless One, was patient with those who had done wrong (Jn.8:11). He inspired within man a new hope, and gave more encouragement to the sinner who cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," than to the self-righteous and boastful Pharisee. He came to seek and to save the lost. Men were taught to understand that man was of worth in the sight of God and that God would spare no effort or sacrifice to save him. This is plainly shewn in the three parables of Lk.15: the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. If Jesus' sinless personality and penetrating teaching aroused a keen sense of sin, His personal attitude and interest, as well as His positive teaching, was intended to bring man to a consciousness that God was bestowing salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus wanted men to see themselves as they were, but He also wanted them to see themselves as they might be. Man's potentiality is reflected in the personality of Jesus. He could not give a remedy until He had made a diagnosis of man's condition. He was a great physician who found man infected with a malignant disease for which he prescribed a remedy and He assured man of skilful help and gave him the promise of Divine aid.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus gave the assurance of new life to men, but they were slow in grasping the value of it, and understanding the way to obtain it. Jesus sealed His life, His teaching, His promises, by His death. It revealed God's love in Him for humanity. His resurrection manifested God's power to those who believed in it. We have no intention of discussing the theological import of these two events of Jesus' ministry, but we must take cognizance of their effect upon the consciousness of men and their ultimate effect upon the conversion experience of the early Christian. These two events quickened and deepened the consciousness of Divine help. Closely following them came the Pentecostal experience. The gift of the Spirit became, for the early disciples, an additional proof of the resourcefulness of the love of God for sinful men. It was unlimited, though as the New Testament indicates, unmerited. The Holy Spirit had been promised, that He might aid in the salvation of man (Acts 1:4, Jn. 14:26, 16:7). Paul looked upon the Holy Spirit as the agency of bringing the love of God to the consciousness of men (Rom. 5:5). "The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us." But we need not go to Paul. Evidence is given by Peter in his Pentecostal address, that the consciousness of the time interpreted the Holy Spirit as Divine Aid which was given through or mediated



by Jesus who had been crucified but was now the risen and exalted Christ. He says, (Acts 2:32,33) "This Jesus did God raise up whereof we are all witnesses. Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear." These early disciples received spiritual gifts which enabled them to impress the consciousness of the community, not as a whole but individually, in great numbers, with the thought which permeated their consciousness, that God was ready to help men if they were ready to be helped by Him.

A fuller realisation and grasp of God's free gift of Christ to man as the Saviour from sin and the meaning of the gift of the Holy Spirit of divine help, comes to us in Paul's teaching. Paul had felt the need of help. When the help which he needed had come to him, he recognised its source and knew its power. In the consciousness of Paul that which we have hitherto termed divine help is called grace. This fuller consciousness and understanding developed from an experience in which the presentation of divine help as a solution for his inward difficulty, his struggle with sin, was accepted by him. His life of missionary activity and observation enhanced this consciousness, so that in his later

writings the full grace of God has a large place. His Epistles are full of teaching which makes his readers and hearers conscious of God's grace. His missionary preaching must have resounded with a similar tone. Men must know that it is God who can help them, God through Jesus Christ (Eph.2:10). This consciousness of grace was not confined to Paul but permeated the consciousness of the Apostolic Church (John 3:16). Parallel to the consciousness of sin is this consciousness of divine help which aids in saving men from evil; divine help which has been manifested in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. The consciousness of divine help or grace is an essential conviction which is antecedent to the experience. "By God's grace I am what I am," for Paul was conscious that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

But did Paul have a consciousness of grace antecedent to his conversion which was in any sense similar to that which he instilled in the hearts of sinners through his preaching and teaching? We must believe that Paul had some familiarity with the genuine tradition about Jesus and the work which He had done and the effects which had been produced in His followers, the Christians, whom Paul had persecuted. He had witnessed the stoning of Stephen. He had beheld, in Stephen, a triumphant faith which was something he could not claim for himself at this time. Paul knew the historical Jesus as He

continued to live in His teaching and in the hearts and lives of His followers. To conceive of him as being entirely ignorant of Jesus is impossible when we consider that the persecutor cannot help but learn something of the faith he is persecuting. Our conclusion is that his conversion had its preliminary preparation both in its negative and positive aspects.<sup>1</sup> To take such a view in no sense does an injustice to the historical accounts of Acts or Paul's reference to the source of his gospel in his epistles.

1. After this chapter had been written there came to my hand Adolf Deissmann's new book, "The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul." I was impressed by the similarity of his position on the antecedents of Paul's conversion. He regards the conversion of Paul as a sudden one, but he maintains that "it was psychologically prepared for, both negatively and positively. Negatively, by the experiences which the soul of the young Pharisee, in its passionate hunger for righteousness, had had under the yoke of the law. We hear the echo of his groanings even twenty or thirty years afterwards in the letters of the convert. Like a curse, there had come upon him the awful discovery that even for the most earnest conscience, it is impossible really to keep the law. Positively, the conversion was no doubt prepared for....by a relatively close familiarity with genuine tradition about Jesus and the effects that Jesus was able to produce in the persons of His confessors whom Paul persecuted." p.186.

### Criticism and Comparison.

The motives described by psychology may be classified in two general groups; those which spring from a desire to escape from sin or from dissatisfaction with their condition of life and those which arise from a desire to attain a new life. The New Testament motives may also be classified in two general groups, as we have already seen; those consisting in some phase of the motive of self-preservation, and those consisting in some phase of the motive of self-expansion. In a general way, the motives of self-preservation and desire to escape from sin or unsatisfactory conditions are similar, as are also those of desire for higher life and the New Testament motive of self-expansion. We can readily see that it is impossible to make a definite and exact comparison of motives, when we remember the lack of exact and definite data regarding the personal experiences of the New Testament converts.

Psychology's general conclusion that the sense of sin is a natural and essential part of conversion is in accord with the New Testament position.

Pratt's opposite view is an exception to the general conclusion of the psychologists. He criticizes Starbuck and James for concluding that the consciousness of sin is more dominant than the ideal of the new life. He regards the convert as more anxious to attain than to escape. In this

Pratt tends to idealize the convert's experience. It appears quite evident that his conclusion with reference to the lack of a sense of sin as an antecedent to New Testament conversion was reached after having examined some of the historical accounts of conversion and not finding a sense of sin distinctly mentioned, he decided it had no place in the conversion experiences of primitive Christianity. It is certainly a case of oversight on his part, in the case of the conversions described in Harold Begbie's 'Twice-Born Men,' "However bad any man may feel himself to be, however hopeless and ashamed and lost he may feel, kneel down and ask God for His mercy." This quotation, which Pratt uses, is taken from an address made by one of the converts and is an appeal to the men in the audience - drunkards, prize fighters, criminals, tramps and petty thieves. It is addressed to them by one who has been one of them, who has lived their life of sin, who understands them and how they are feeling, because he has come through the experience which he desires them to have. The thing that he fears is that a sense of their sinful condition may keep them from seeking the experience. He fears lest they may conclude, that, because of their sinful condition, their state is a hopeless one and that such a deep sense of sin may

turn them away from God. Pratt's conclusion, in these respects at least, is unwarranted by the proof and examples cited. The true conclusion seems to lie between the two extremes which Pratt and James have taken. A sense of sin does many times aid in a preparation for conversion. However, to expect this sense of sin to be acute and to result in a divided self, in every case, is certainly a mistake. It is the same kind of mistake which has frequently been made since Luther, namely, attempting to establish a normative conversion experience and to enumerate and describe in detail what must take place in a conversion experience. Some of the religious psychologists of the past decade have been endeavouring to describe the essence of the experience without any emphasis on particular types.<sup>1</sup>

The mistake made by Starbuck ~~appears to~~ have been that of depending entirely upon questionnaire replies and drawing his conclusion from reports largely from evangelical sources where conversion was emphasised in the regular weekly services and frequently in special services and revivals. While many of the respondents were not converted in revivals and would not indicate any influence of revivals upon their experience, yet oftentimes impressions remained which had been

1. The Psychology of Religion, James H. Snowden.

received at such meetings on various occasions. This perhaps increased the number who experienced an acute sense of sin. However, it does not account for the fact that so many converts experienced a feeling akin to the sense of sin and that they thought about their sinful condition<sup>1</sup> even more than the ideal life.

1. Psychologically sin is in its origin a warp of the instincts, we are told; if this be the case then it is easier to understand why the sense of sin is such a factor in conversion. The psychologists are then dealing with something inherent in the individual, which in some cases because of inhibition, has become more prevalent, as actual sin, than in others. In other cases, because of training in inhibition of actual sin, a desire to sin will not be so pronounced. To accept this view would not necessitate a change of man's spiritual and moral attitude toward sin nor lessen his personal responsibility for it any more than Calvinistic theology's doctrine of original sin, freed its holder from a personal responsibility for a sinful state and sinful actions.

## Chapter V.

### THE CONTENT OF THE CONVERSION EXPERIENCE.

We have considered the general nature of conversion and man's need for such a religious experience and preliminary to our work in this chapter we have discussed the antecedents of the experience. Now we must examine psychology's analysis of the content of the experience.

The content of the conversion-experience consists of a process and a state. The process is the psychological change which takes place during the conversion. The state is the condition, which as a consequent of the process, immediately follows it.

### THE CONVERSION PROCESS.

All religious psychologists are agreed that there are at least two general types of the conversion process: the gradual and the sudden. It is not to be inferred that each of these types involves a process which is entirely different from the other. The time element is said to be the essential difference. The gradual process may extend over many weeks or months, indeed it has been known to have been in action for a dozen or more years, before it was finally completed. The sudden conversion, as its name implies, is often almost instantaneous, coming, as it appears, with sudden swiftness. In the case of other individuals it appears to be spontaneous, dawning upon them similar to an



awakening from sleep. They realise that they have come into a different state; of the process which brought them into it, they seem to be able to give no information. We shall understand these two types of the process better if we make a careful examination of one or two of the typical examples of each process. Scores of cases are used as illustration by the psychologists. Many of these experiences are described by the subjects themselves

#### THE GRADUAL CONVERSION PROCESS.

I shall give two accounts of gradual conversion; one from outside Christendom and the other a Christian conversion. I do this that I may be entirely fair to certain of the psychologists who have made a careful study of both Christian and non-Christian conversion.

The first is that of Ramakrishna,<sup>1</sup> the famous Bengalee saint and mystic and the founder of the Order which bears his name. From boyhood he evinced an intense religious nature. He was of a poor but high caste Brahmin family. Early in life he was taught to be proud of his caste position and unyielding religious orthodoxy was impressed upon him. The religious pride of caste so possessed him that he persistently refused to accept any cooked food within the temple precincts because the founder of the temple was a Shudra woman.

The first stage of his conversion dates from the time when

1. A full account of this conversion is given in "Religious Consciousness" by J.B.Pratt. p. 129ff.

he began to frequent the shrine of Kali. "The thought of the Mother Goddess got hold of his imagination and his emotions and mastered his attention to the exclusion of everything else." He looked upon the goddess as his mother and the mother of the universe. He had an unsatisfied religious longing and a sense of his own incompleteness. At times, he had visions of the goddess, which gave him a degree of satisfaction but his trouble was far too inward for any vision to give him entire and permanent satisfaction.

According to the analysis of Ramakrishna he was troubled by a "divided self". He was lacking in inner unity of a perfect moral self-hood. There are three points which give evidence of the inner lack of harmony. He still retained something of the old Brahmin pride of caste and something, though it is not so evident, of the 'common human love of things.' He was, also, greatly troubled by the solicitations of the flesh, though he never yielded to them. The emphasis of his conscious attention appears to have been always quite definitely fixed upon the ideal toward which he was striving rather than upon the old and lower self which he was seeking to outgrow. Ramakrishna's period of storm and stress continued for twelve years. In later life he looked back upon this period 'as a great religious tornado.' Through it all there appears to be a consuming desire to be free from those things which bound him. Professor Pratt regards

Ramakrishna as having faced his dilemma with an 'earnest direct attitude believing evidently, that God helps those who are willing to help themselves.' That he depended on some power outside himself appears evident from the following quotation:

"Mother, oh my mother, is this the result of calling upon thee and believing in thee?" The reply is said to have come in a sweet voice accompanied by a sweet smiling face, "My son, how can you hope to realise the highest truth unless you give up the love of your body and of your little self." This thought of 'the little self' and the love for it, were the greatest evil obstacles in the way of his complete religious conversion. The importance which he placed upon the hindrances of the selfish-self is seen in his teaching when he says, "The sense of 'I' in us is the greatest obstacle in the path of God-vision. It covers the truth. When 'I' is dead, all troubles cease."

The victory was won as Pratt describes it, 'not by any sudden insight or reformation but by a gradual process, in which both increased self-control, intellectual illumination, and (most important of all) an absolute unification of values, played important and mutually helpful parts.' The unification of the powers of consciousness and the peace and joy that flowed from it were permanent.

The other case of gradual conversion is from the Russian

church. It is the experience of Tolstoi.<sup>1</sup> The story of his conversion, as he has related it in "My Confessions", is one of the most interesting gradual conversions in religious literature. At fifty years of age, Tolstoi found himself in the midst of what should have been for him happy surroundings: he had wealth; he was at the height of his literary fame; his family was with him, happy and contented. Yet he was conscious of the emptiness, the vanity, the meaninglessness of all things. He describes himself as a man lost in a forest, rushing about trying to find his way out, and though he realises that he is going further astray, he is impelled to keep on at his frantic rushing about. To free himself from the horror of it all, he was ready to kill himself. After a long period of such aimless search, he came upon a gleam of light in the thought of the existence of God. When he pondered upon it life re-arose within him, and for a time he would feel the possibility of existing and of finding joy in life. From a conviction of God's existence he would ponder over his personal relation to Him or perhaps his thoughts would be turned to the triune God, the creator who had sent His Son, the Redeemer. At other times, the consciousness of God would melt away as ice melts and the thought that 'God is' would be replaced by the thought that 'there is no God.' At length he rested in a final faith. "God is life", he said, "Live to seek God and Life will

1. The Psychology of Religion. Jas. H. Snowden, p. 148 f.  
 Religious Consciousness. Jas. B. Pratt, p. 138 ff.  
 The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James, p.184 ff.

not be without God." At this, life rose up within him stronger than ever and a new light broke in which never left him. He makes this striking statement of the manner of his conversion: "As gradually, imperceptibly as life decayed in me, till I reached the impossibility of living, till life stood still and I longed to kill myself, so gradually and imperceptibly I felt the glow and strength of life return." His life which had previously been thoroughly saturated in worldliness and given over to dissipation, when he became aware of its fruitlessness, underwent a profound change. The process in all its steps took place gradually and moved slowly to its culmination.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE SUDDEN CONVERSION PROCESS.

The word 'sudden' is not a suitable one to designate the second type of the conversion process. It is a word which was 'taken over' by psychology from popular evangelical theology. From time to time many words have been used as substitutes but there is always a recurrence to the term 'sudden'. James uses 'sudden' and 'instantaneous' interchangeably. Starbuck uses the terms 'self-surrender' and 'spontaneous awakening'; however these must be reserved for discussion at a later time as a special significance is attached to them. Coe uses the general term, 'striking transformation', but it is so inclusive and general

1. A consideration of psychology's analysis of the elements of a gradual conversion is postponed until we have given our attention for a time to the sudden conversion type.

that many conversions might be classified under it without in any way defining them or indicating their chief characteristics. In many conversion cases, the earlier stage of the process is gradual and the final consummation is sudden. These cases have been frequently classified as sudden because the individual regarded the sudden consummation as the conversion. Such cases should form an intermediate type, which for convenience, I am going to call "seemingly-sudden." The instantaneous and spontaneous cases of conversion I shall classify as "sudden."

Perhaps no more typical example of the "seemingly-sudden", non-Christian conversion is to be found than that of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore<sup>1</sup> the father of the famous Bengalee poet. He was a member of a rich and orthodox Bengalee family, which clung devotedly to the worship of Kali and the use of images. As a youth, Tagore received most of his early instruction and inspiration from his grandmother. The type of religion thus received appears to have sufficed him until after the death of his grandmother. He was then eighteen years of age. While his grandmother was dying, during the singing of a hymn, there came upon him a strong aversion to wealth and luxury. It was accompanied by joy and delight and a feeling that previously he had not known God, nor had he known what religion was. This new-found delight soon passed. He sought to recover it but in vain. A deep gloom and despondency settled upon him. Despite his continual longing and

1. Religious Consciousness. Pratt, p. 134 ff.

desire, the ecstatic feeling did not come again. He now entered upon a period of depression bordering on despair in which intellectual and emotional factors were closely interwoven; he felt himself lacking in knowledge; he wanted intellectual light and he wanted relief from the weight of the unintelligible world; he wanted to be free. The polytheistic ideas and idolatrous worship of his family did not now attract him. Life was dreary. The world was described by him as a 'graveyard'. Tagore is not classified by the psychologists as a "divided-self", but as one lacking perfect unity of developed moral selfhood, because he had not yet found anything big enough to appeal to his big nature. His difficulty was largely a metaphysical one. His interests were cosmic but he could not find the reality of the cosmos. Life was dark and dreary and meaningless for him and he continues to be inactive, irresolute, uninterested and aimless. This continued four years without any hopeful results. However, considerable intellectual insight had been gained from English philosophical books and from childish memories of Ram Mohun Roy. He was intellectually convinced of the probability of the existence of one God. That which brought about the completion of his conversion was what might be called a mere chance. He picked up a loose, fluttering leaf of a Sanskrit book and unable to read it, he took it to a Sanskrit scholar, who translated it. It proved to be a page from one of the old Upanishads, which expounded the omni-

:presence of the Divine and its unity with the human spirit. Tagore says "When I learned the explanation, nectar from paradise streamed down upon me." He regarded the message, from the chance page, as a divine voice from heaven in response to his intense desire. All his longings and desires were satisfied. He began to enjoy the inexpressible supreme treasure, feeling that God had given Himself to him. He renounced all desire for worldly pleasure and took his delight in God alone. His faith in God took deep root and he tasted divine joy. This time he did not lose his happiness and peace. His life proved a power for righteousness and for religion, throughout Bengal. In a mission of service his life became full, rich and satisfying. He was looked upon by all who knew him as one living in the presence of a spiritual world.

Of equal interest but very different is the experience of David Brainerd<sup>1</sup> who sought deliverance from sin, for some time, without attaining it. After thinking the whole matter through carefully he came to the conclusion that he was selfish in his desires and in his search for salvation. He concluded it was self-interest and self-happiness which had been prompting him and such a motive had resulted in 'nothing but self worship, and an horrid abuse of God.' For two or three days he continued in this state of mind. Then while attempting to pray but being quite unable to concentrate his mind upon it or any other duty, he

1. James "Varieties", p. 212, 253.



suddenly felt his conviction of sin gone. At first it worried him, for he had been depressed because of it for a long period. His freedom from distress was quickly followed by a new state of feelings. Unspeakable joy and 'glory' seemed to overwhelm him. There was no external brightness or imagination of a glow of light, but he had a new inward apprehension or view of God. It was different from anything he had previously experienced. It had no reference to any one person of the Trinity, but appeared to be divine glory. His ecstasy is expressed with understanding and feeling. "My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable, to see such a God, such a Glorious Divine Being; and I was inwardly pleased that he should be God over all for ever and ever." He regarded the way of salvation as open to him 'with such infinite wisdom, suitableness and excellency, that I wondered that I should ever think of any other way of salvation.' After this experience, it was a cause of wonder to Brainerd that all others seeking the way of salvation 'did not become aware of and comply with this way of salvation entirely by the righteousness of Christ.' He was certain that his salvation could never have been attained except in reliance upon Christ.

What is looked upon by James as a most unusual sudden conversion is that of M. Alphonse Ratisbonne<sup>1</sup> who was converted from being a free-thinking French Jew to Catholicism. This man was irreligious, but he had a brother who had been converted and

1. Varieties, p. 223, 257.

was a Catholic priest. He showed great displeasure with this brother and his profession. While on a visit to Rome he met a Frenchman who attempted to make a proselyte of him. However he made no further progress than to persuade him to hang a religious medal round his neck. Even this appears to have been done 'half-jocosely'. He also accepted and read a copy of a short prayer to the Virgin. M. Ratisbonne regarded his own part in the conversation with the Frenchman as being of a light order and devoid of any spirit of earnestness. He records the fact that for some days he was unable to banish the words of the prayer from his mind and that the night before his conversion crisis, he had an alarming dream, in which he saw the image of a black cross, without the figure of the Christ upon it. The day of his conversion his mind was free and he spent the morning in trivial conversation until noon. At that time he went for a drive with the Frenchman. His friend asked him to wait for him while he attended to some duty at the Church San Andrea delle Fratte. During the time his friend was away from the carriage, he entered the church with the intention of observing its architecture. Suddenly, he appears to have gone into a swoon, during which he had a vision of the Virgin, which he refers to as indescribable. His friend, calling his name, brought him out of the swoon. He was unable to answer any questions but continued to kiss the medal which hung about his neck and which had the image of the

Virgin upon it. He felt himself changed and regarded himself 'as another self'. Explosive joy seemed to overwhelm him. He regards it as a sacred experience in which he had received new light and new life. In it he had acquired a knowledge and a faith. He had never read a book of religion nor a page of the Bible. This man, according to his own description, had entered the Church in Rome, in the darkness of sin and iniquity; he had come from it in the fullness of spiritual light. He uses the metaphor, of one born blind and later receiving sight, to describe his experience. Such a one sees light but cannot define it. He has seen the light of truth, as he regards it, but cannot explain or define how it has happened. The conversion experience was to this man a real, definite and memorable event, which left a deep impression upon the remainder of his life.

A case no less interesting and definite in its results is that of the Oxford graduate,<sup>1</sup> the son of a clergyman, who had been an intermittent drunkard from his youth. Until the age of thirty-three (the time of his conversion) he had entertained no desire to reform on religious grounds. But he frequently suffered acute regret and remorse because of the drink habit which he was unable to overcome. He speaks of the remorse and sufferings which accompanied it as inexpressible. His vows to reform from drink were always broken.

1. James "Varieties", p. 220.

1. . Appendix to article on the Psychology of Religious, Phenomena.

One summer afternoon he was converted, while alone in his own bedroom. For a whole month he had not taken drink. He had entertained no troublesome thoughts about his soul. A friend of his had sent him a copy of Henry Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World" and had asked his opinion of it as a literary work, only. He was giving the afternoon to a critical examination of it, intending to write his criticism when he had completed reading it. This man had made his living as a journalist and was proud of his literary ability. It was in the spirit of a literary critic that he approached the reading of this book. While engaged in this work, in his own words, "God met me face to face." A verse of scripture which he had read scores of times before arrested his attention and held him transfixed. "He that hath the Son hath life eternal, he that hath not the Son hath not life." He could not proceed with the book until he had considered what these words involved. He had a feeling that another was present with him in the room, and he felt supremely happy. He interpreted it, that he had touched the eternal and the eternal had touched him. God's love overwhelmed him and a great sorrow crept over him. He became aware that in his folly he had lost all. He had a feeling of sorrow mingled with regret. Then it dawned upon him, that 'there is no name under heaven whereby you can be saved except that of the Lord Jesus Christ.' He regarded this salvation, of which he became immediately conscious, as

'the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father and rejoiced in a conversion so astounding, that in less than twenty-four hours, the whole village knew of it. The next day he fell to the temptation of drink, but realising his mistake, he surrendered his selfish desires completely and from that hour the temptation of drink left him.

We have been giving our attention to these examples of conversion not only to discover something of the manner of the process but that we might also observe the time element involved in the experience. We shall next make analysis of the contribution to the conversion by the individual experiencing it. What activities of consciousness is the convert aware of as the experience is taking place within him? In other words what does the convert put into his conversion?

#### THE CONVERT'S CONSCIOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONVERSION PROCESS.

Just as there are types of the process, so there are classes or types into which the converts may be divided with reference to what they contribute to their own conversion. These classes correspond quite well to the types into which the process has already been divided. The gradual type corresponds to what we call the volitional class; the seemingly-sudden to the self-surrender class; and the sudden, in general, corresponds to the

spontaneous awakening class.

### THE VOLITIONAL CLASS.

In this class of converts, the regenerative change is usually a gradual one and 'consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits.'<sup>1</sup> The movement may proceed much more rapidly at certain critical points than at others. The intellect, emotion and will are active in the process. In some of these conversions the intellect is the dominant factor and the emotions seem to play no part until the individual is satisfied as to the soundness of his intellectual conclusions. Then the emotions are affected and in turn the will moves to decisive action. Through it all the individual is conscious of the process, although he may not fully realize how much progress has been made. The will is the predominant element and the individual struggles on through his intellectual doubts, depressions, or conviction of sin until he reaches that which he seeks. The way is fought through to the end until the ideal desired is attained.

Determination is the key-word in this type of experience. The individual has a desire for something higher and better and is not satisfied with life on the plane where he is living it. In the case of others it may be that they have lost faith in the old life or that it has become meaningless to them, as was the

1. James, "Varieties," p. 206.

case with Tolstoi. The new ideal may be expressed as a desire to be a Christian or it may be a desire to attain a moral ideal. Many of the respondents were not able to express in words just what their ideal included, but even though no definite expression of it could be given, yet there was always evidence that it was very real to them and the determination to attain it was very earnest. There is always the urge within which drives forward the individual to the attainment of a fuller, freer, more unified self-hood. The struggle is kept up until the desired end is attained to the satisfaction of the individual. As we have already seen from the examples, this may take several years before the process reaches final completion.

#### THE SELF-SURRENDER CLASS.

The experience of this class of converts differs from the volitional class in that the struggle to attain is likely to be more intense, to continue for a shorter period and to terminate in a different manner. We recall from the chapter on the Antecedents of Conversion that the struggle preceding Conversion is often very acute and intense, that it is described by psychology as the efforts of one self striving against what appears to be another self. This class furnishes splendid examples of such phenomena. The fierce struggle continues for an indefinite period, which is followed by the crisis called self-surrender.

There comes a time in the struggle when the convert becomes aware that no progress is being made, that the struggle appears useless and futile. He has striven against the forces which are within him and seemingly he has accomplished nothing in the way of the complete victory sought. Why struggle any longer? He ceases from struggle and puts forth no further effort. There soon comes, sometimes immediately, to the convert the consciousness that all is right within, that a moral and spiritual victory has been won. The struggle is over and the end which was sought has been attained. Self-surrender, James<sup>1</sup> and Starbuck maintain is necessary for all conversions. In the volitional class it may only be partial, but in this class it must be complete. The personal will must be given up. Case after case is cited in proof of this theory. The resistance may focus about some special vice, but in the majority of cases there appears to be no particular sin that is being retained.

In his conversion crisis, Augustine was aware of one thing which stood between him and peace in his soul. "The very toys of toys and varieties of varieties, my ancient mistresses, still held me. 'Dost thou cast us off?'" they seemed to whisper to him. It was all settled when he appeared to hear a voice telling him to take up and read the word of God. He did so, and the first passage which his eyes came upon was sufficient. 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not

1. Varieties, p. 208.



in strifes and envyings; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in concupiscence.' This verse of scripture made it easy to surrender all. To part with his mistresses now became his desire rather than his regret. 'Instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away'. In the case of this man, whom James regards as a psychological genius, the surrender of self-interests became the turning point in the conversion struggle which had continued for some time. How very similar is the circumstance which brought about the completion of the conversion in Augustine's case and that of young Tagore who as you recall received light from a chance page of the Upanishads.

Personal pride may be that around which the struggle centres and it may be some time before the individual realizes what obstacle is standing in the way of victory. Such was the case with President Finney who was ashamed to have anyone discover him in the posture of prayer during his struggle. When he overcame his pride, his conversion followed quickly.

The determination to make a complete surrender is frequently mentioned by the respondents. It is expressed by some converts as 'determination to yield.' These as a group would take an intermediate position between those called the volitional class and the self-surrender class. This emphasises the difficulty

which is experienced if anyone attempts to make the classification too rigid or arbitrary.

Self-surrender, in its general use by religious psychology, means not only the giving up of sinful, selfish habits and desires but it also includes giving up the personal will. One psychologist<sup>1</sup> asserts that in even the most 'voluntarily built up sort of regeneration' there are times of self-surrender; that in the majority of cases of conversion, 'when the will has done its uttermost toward bringing one close to unification aspired after, it seems that the last step must be left to other forces and performed without the help of its activity.' The following excerpts illustrate the factor of the experience<sup>to</sup> which the psychologists refer: 'I yielded myself to what I conceived to be Higher Guidance. I yielded with trembling but with importunity.' 'At the close of the period I found myself at one with all things'. I had said I would not give up; but when my will was broken, it was all over. 'All at once it occurred to me that I might be saved too, if I would stop trying to do it myself, and follow Jesus, somehow I lost my load'. Another says 'I simply said, "Lord I have done all I can; I leave the whole matter with Thee." Immediately like a flash of light, there came to me a great peace<sup>2</sup>. The old adage is aptly quoted by one psychologist "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." To rely upon a power outside themselves and greater than themselves, that conversion may occur,

1. James, "Varieties", p. 208.

2. Starbuck, p. 91, 114.

appears necessary to the converts of this class.

#### THE SPONTANEOUS AWAKENING CLASS.

The cases of this class, are those in which 'the new life breaks out without any apparent, immediate, adequate cause.' A man who had been a drunkard for years attended a city mission. Afterwards he went home and read his Bible and prayed far into the night. He then went to sleep and according to his testimony 'during the night the thing cleared itself up in my mind, and I was ready to live or die by it.' For a period of four years, one individual had entertained a desire to be a Christian but she was unable to feel the forgiveness of sin. One morning, while sitting in her room reading, peace and happiness came upon her. In the majority of cases which belong to this class there does not appear to be any antecedent struggle such as is mentioned in the other classes. In some cases, as that of M. Ratisbonne, a real desire for a change of heart does not appear to be present among the factors of the conversion. In fact some individuals seem to have been in a state of resistance. The personal conscious contribution is entirely lacking. There is no conflict with evil; no will effort is expended; the convert appears to awake to the fact that he is in a saving relation to the higher powers. One convert has epitomized the absence of conscious participation on the part of the subject in a descrip-

:tion of his own conversion. 'My religious life seemed to come into being at that moment, -- without any thought or act of my own'. Such experiences have proved to be of exceptional interest to the psychologist because of having the appearance of the miraculous.

#### THE STATE CONSEQUENT ON CONVERSION.

The psychologist's keen scientific interest in the process of the conversion experience has not kept him from analysing the elements of the state consequent on conversion. 'The ultimate test of religious values', says one, 'is....definable only in terms of what is attained.'<sup>1</sup> The chief value for the individual who is converted is not something psychological; it is something ethical. The most important question then, is, what is attained? What are the elements of the consequential state? What has the convert got out of the experience?

The state which, in the experience of the convert, follows immediately upon the conversion process is called by Leuba the faith-state. The faith of this state as psychology has analysed it, is not an intellectual faith but a faith "par excellence." Instead of being intellectual it is immediate and intuitive. It is the assurance 'that I, the individual I, am saved now and forever.' James and Leuba are in agreement that faith as a conceptual belief is really accessory and non-essential to the

1. Coe, The Spiritual Life, p. 114.

process. The faith-state or state of assurance, as James calls it, has definite characteristics which religious psychology has observed and described.

The central element of this state is the sense of relief. All worry is gone and the struggle which it accompanied is over. The burden which bore down so heavily upon the soul during the conviction period has been lifted. Sin has no longer any terror for the one who formerly felt its heavy hand. The feeling of incompleteness which depressed some candidates passed away when the experience became complete. The struggle of one self against the other has ceased. The lower ideal or actual self appears to have lost its compelling power and to have passed out of existence. 'Escape', 'deliverance', 'relief', are words used by converts to describe that which they were first conscious of gaining by the conversion.

The sense of relief or deliverance has a fit complement in the positive feeling of satisfaction, peace, joy and harmony of soul. It matters not what has been the pre-conversion experience or to what type or class the individual's experience belongs, whether volitional, self-surrender, or spontaneous awakening has been the characteristic element, if the conversion is genuine, it is always followed by a degree of satisfaction, peace, joy and harmony - a sense that all is ultimately well. This positive phase of the state of mind has been regarded by one writer as

'a passion of willingness, of acquiescence, of admiration.'

In the case of seemingly sudden and sudden conversion this characteristic element of the conversion crisis is, sometimes, so intense that it is called the ecstasy of happiness. Some converts are so overwhelmed by their feelings that their happiness takes complete possession of them and they break forth in shouting and praises. Others feel happy enough to do so, even though they may not yield to the prompting of their feelings. President Finney<sup>2</sup> said of his experience, "All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out; and the utterances of my heart was 'I want to pour my whole soul out to God.'" He felt conscious of Christ's presence when he was alone in his office. The wonderful love which was shed abroad in his heart was inexpressible. Henry Ward Beecher<sup>1</sup> said of this phase of his experience, 'In an instance there rose up in me such a sense of God's taking care of those who put their trust in Him that for an hour all the world was crystalline, the heavens were lucid, and I sprang to my feet and began to cry and laugh.'

A third feature is the sense of perceiving truth not known before. It is intuitive or spiritual illumination. To many of the new converts 'mysteries become lucid.' Things, of which the convert was not previously aware, appear in his consciousness. Scripture passages are comprehended which were previously meaningless. A new view of moral and spiritual values seems in-

1. James, "Varieties", p. 255.

2. James, "Varieties", p. 254.

:tuitively to come into the mind of some converts. There are, to others, spontaneous awakening to new truths. There is, not frequently, an immediate certainty of God's grace, of justification, of salvation. A sense of justification, in that sins are forgiven, and that there is harmony with God in the world, is a frequent element of the experience.

Another characteristic of this state is the objective change which the world appears to undergo. It manifests itself as an appearance of newness. It is as though the individual's subjective state of harmony and peace had been projected into the objective world. This is a very common phenomenon. Among the fuller accounts of conversion published by Leuba and James there are few converts who have not mentioned this element of their experience. The appearance of newness is described as extending to everything; while some mention the sun, moon, stars and sky as objects of wonder and newness; others are impressed by the beauty and newness of the grass, flowers and trees. Something has taken place which causes them to see a new beauty in things about them. Before his conversion thunder and lightning had a terrifying effect upon Jonathan Edwards; after the experience he rejoiced at seeing the flash of lightning and the <sup>hearing</sup> crash of thunder. In the numerous responses which illustrate this effective result such inclusive phrases as these are found: 'everything appeared new'; 'everybody was altered'; 'everything looked new';

'all things have become new'. For some time following conversion the convert is aware of this sense of newness and then he appears to make an adjustment to the situation and things are no longer regarded as new.

#### THE CAUSAL EXPLANATION OF CONVERSION.

We now ask psychology the question, how and why does conversion happen in this way? What is to be the explanation of the process and its consequent state?

In the gradual or volitional type of conversion psychology does not encounter much difficulty. Every step in the process is easily explained by general psychological and physiological processes. It is the building up, piece by piece, 'of a new set of moral and spiritual habits.' The process may be more rapid at certain points than at others but it is an entirely natural way of making the change from one moral state to another. That the gradual conversion may appear to proceed by 'jerks and starts' is to be expected, for that is the way growths in the physical body takes place. Progress is made in much the same way in education, music, art and science. Rapid progress may be made for a period then an interval intervenes when scarcely any perceptible progress is made. Rather trivial examples are cited by many of the psychologists in proof of the theory that this type of conversion is no different from any other experience



of life except that the faculties are engaged in the sphere of religion rather than every day activities.

In explaining the conversions which are seemingly sudden or sudden, psychology admits that there are forces outside the consciousness of the individual that aid in bringing about the suddenness of the experience. The seemingly-sudden conversion proceeds as a regular psychological process until a certain point is reached where a break occurs in the experience. This break comes at the point described by psychology as the self-surrender crisis. The individual has struggled to attain a certain end but has failed. He is conscious of the failure of his own efforts and he gives up, acknowledging his failure. Suddenly he becomes aware that he has attained his desire. He feels relieved of his burden and his difficulty has disappeared. Peace, harmony and satisfaction have come to him. How? He cannot tell and he disclaims any part in the saving process. It is as though he had been struggling in the angry waves of the tempest tossed sea and had given up hope of saving himself. The last thing he remembers, was sinking beneath a great wave. Then suddenly he is conscious again and aware that he has been saved. He can offer no explanation as to how the rescue was accomplished. A greater break still is found in the experience of the individual whose conversion is sudden. In none of these sudden cases of conversion is there any struggle. In some there is a desire for

salvation. It comes to the convert as a spontaneous awakening, but there is never any doubt of its reality or genuineness.

Here is need for a 'gap-filler' in psychology's explanation of conversion. The break in the psychological process of the experience in one type of conversion begins with the self-surrender crisis and ends with the appearance in consciousness of the complete conversion complex. Even more baffling to psychology is the absence of any connected psychological process in the case of the sudden conversion or spontaneous awakening. Something must be done to bridge over the chasm found in such experiences. For this purpose psychology makes recourse to the subconscious.<sup>1</sup> What happens is that the individual becomes temporarily exhausted at the self-surrender crisis. This relaxation of the lower or actual conscious self gives opportunity for the higher emotion to enter the arena of consciousness from the subconscious region and become the controlling self. This higher complex has been ripening in the subconscious region and its entrance and the exhaustion of personal effort 'must simultaneously have conspired, in order to produce the result.'

In the cases of sudden or instantaneous conversion, without

1. If it be doubted that the subconscious should be classified as a hypothetical 'gap-filler', a 'link' to connect the two known ends of the chain of experience, we need only to quote a well-known religious psychologist who says, 'Unconscious mental processes are postulated in order to provide links to make complete in thought an otherwise incomplete chain of mental causation'. An Introduction to the Psychology of Religion 1923, by R. H. Thouless, p. 104.

any previous struggle to produce exhaustion and even in the absence of any previous acute feelings, the higher complex, having reached a certain degree of energy and completeness within the subconscious region, bursts through all barriers and sweeps in like a flood following the bursting of a retaining wall.

We are told where the conversion takes place and we immediately ask how does the subconscious do that which the conscious activities have failed to accomplish or have not even undertaken to accomplish? Psychology replies it is due to 'incubation' or 'cerebration' in the subliminal or subconscious region. We press our question still further and ask, what is 'incubation' or 'cerebration' in a subconscious region? James<sup>1</sup> undertakes an answer, by an explanation of the association of ideas, maintaining that the unknown process is to be explained by means of the known process. But even the processes of change in the mental system are not fully explainable by psychology. 'How the excitement shifts in a man's mental system, and why aims that were peripheral become at a certain moment central', psychology can give only a general description and cannot explain every detail of the forces at work. In the end James falls back upon a 'symbolism of mechanical equilibrium'. The mind is regarded as a system of ideas each with the excitement it arouses and with tendencies towards impulse and action or inhibition which mutually check or tend to reinforce each other in action. The

1. Varieties, p. 194 ff.

entire group of ideas is being altered by being added to and subtracted from in the course of continual experience. Thus 'a mental system may be undermined and weakened by interstitial alteration' and yet keep its equilibrium, just as a building may be partially torn down yet for a time keep upright, by what might be called force of habit. Some new idea, sudden shock or emotion may cause the whole collection of ideas to fall together and thus change the centre of gravity to a new place where it may become stable and permanent. This is what happens in a sudden conversion.

This work may go on subconsciously or half-subconsciously i.e. the conscious and the subconscious may interact in a conversion process. When it is a case in which the subject has a well developed subconscious life and experiences conversion, it is impossible to give a full account of the process.<sup>1</sup>

Very similar to this is the conclusion of Starbuck who admits that we do not know how the unconscious process of conversion takes place or in what way the preliminary antecedents tend to work out a transformation of character. He believes that a conversion never takes place without antecedent thought or desire. And he explains that it is very easy for the convert to overlook the antecedent thought in making record of a conversion experience. The process which intervenes between the antecedent thought and the conversion he says 'is below the threshold of

1. James, "Varieties," p. 198.

consciousness and thus 'evades analysis.' However he is not satisfied without attempting some explanation. The nervous system and its functioning furnishes potential material. He says, 'If we turn to our crude analogy of nerve cells and connections -- we may get a definite picture at whatever cost of accuracy'.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly he explains the phenomena of beginning the new life as 'the organization of nerve elements about a new centre.'<sup>2</sup> At another time he says that it 'seems entirely accurate' to describe the new power and activities 'as born of the Spirit' but he immediately adds, 'It is as if brain areas which had been dormant had suddenly come into activity - as if this stored up energy had been liberated and now begun to function.'<sup>3</sup> This is an attempt to explain the psychical phenomena by physiological adjustment and activity. The scientific theory<sup>4</sup> is that an important change like conversion which has taken place in the psychical realm, has as its cause a definite physiological change or adjustment which has preceded it.

Why do not all people experience a sudden conversion? It is because some people are not 'in possession of a large region in which mental work can go on subliminally, and from which invasive experiences, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness',<sup>5</sup> may issue forth.

1. Starbuck, p. 406.

2. Starbuck, p. 118.

3. Ibid. p. 132.

4. Ibid. p. 2.

5. James, "Varieties", p. 237.

Professor Coe<sup>1</sup> offers a full explanation of the causes of the seemingly-sudden and the sudden types of conversion. There are three sets of factors which are favourable to a sudden or seemingly-sudden conversion, when they unite in a subject; first, pronounced emotional sensibility; second, tendency to automatism; and third, suggestibility of the passive type. If these are present the result might be predicted with quite a degree of certainty; there would be a sudden and striking transformation. After a hypnotic test, those who were found to be fertile in self-suggestion were classed as 'spontaneous' and those not fertile in self-suggestion were classed as 'passive.' His inference is that in the 'spontaneous' class, self-suggestion of the impossibility of the experience prevented the influences, which tend to bring about conversion, from resulting in the effects desired. The 'passive' class, being free from self-suggestion, had easily experienced that which was expected. Are we to conclude from this explanation that conversion is an automatic experience? According to Coe, this is not a necessary inference. The temperamental origin, passive suggestibility and the presence of automatisms do not diminish the significance of conversion, although it is accepted by other psychologists<sup>2</sup> to confirm the view that sudden conversion is connected with the possession of an active subliminal self. It only means that when certain factors are present in the subject this change may

1. The Spiritual Life, by G.A.Coe, p. 112.

2. James, "Varieties", p. 240.

clothe itself in certain 'emotional habilament', otherwise it will not. As an apologetic for conversion Coe adds 'The substance of religious experience as far transcends their emotional forms as a man transcends the clothes he wears.'<sup>1</sup>

Psychologists are quite well agreed that cases of seemingly-sudden and sudden conversions are best explained by attributing them to the action of the subconscious; however, as we have seen, they are not fully agreed on the question how the subconscious action should be interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid. p. 144.

2. Dr. Morton Prince has proposed an interesting explanation of sudden conversions. According to his theory it is to be accounted for by a lapse of memory and a retention of emotion. The famous patient Miss Beauchamp, in a state of ill-health and despair went into a church to pray. While engaged in this devotion all was suddenly changed, without her knowing how or why. The resulting state had all characteristics of conversion. She looked upon the experience as a Visitation and was determined to enter a convent. Dr. Prince explains that because of concentration, she went into a self-hypnotic state. In this state her consciousness was made up of a great many disconnected memories of a religious character and concomitant emotions. When she awoke from the trance, all the memories of the hypnotic state were forgotten. At first, her mind was blank of any connected logical ideas, but she was conscious of her emotions for they had remained. This theory would substitute an alternating consciousness state (as psychology calls the hypnotic state) for the co-conscious state in James' theory.

## PART II.

## THE CONVERSION EXPERIENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Conversion in the New Testament so far as it can be analysed, is a psychological process. Whatever experience takes place within the New Testament convert, occurs in the psychical realm. As we are well aware, New Testament conversion is ever characterised by an inwardness that is often mystifying. It is a consideration of the content of the inner process which is called by Jesus, 'a change of mind,' that interests us in this chapter. What is the time element involved in this process? Is it as sudden as it seems or has it elements preceding its sudden appearance? What is the process, step by step, through which this complete change takes place? What are the characteristics of the resultant state? What are the causes which bring about this change? These are questions which we must seek to answer in our examination of New Testament teaching and experience of conversion. However, before we commence an analysis of the process and the state consequent upon it and undertake to determine what are its causes, let us give our attention for a time to some of the examples of New Testament conversion in order that we may have clearly before us the general characteristics of the content of the experience and that we may observe the time element involved in it.

While we are aware that the description of the Prodigal



Sons's conversion is a parable and that such a case of conversion may or may not have come under the personal observation of Jesus, yet in bold outline it gives to us his ideas of what is taking place in the mind of a repentant sinner as he is converted from a sinful state of misery and degradation, to a state of forgiveness, fellowship and happiness. The story is so familiar that we need but sketch the pre-suppositions in the process leading up to the act of will which turned the Prodigal homeward. When he came to himself two things occupied his consciousness; the fact of his sin and the consciousness that many others, even servants at his father's house, were faring better than he. He thought of his sin and of his father. It was sin which had brought him to this dire necessity. He thinks of his necessity, and his sin crowds into his conscious thoughts. He thinks of his father, his liberality and abundance, but his sin recurs to his mind and he resolves to be frank about it and to express his sorrow by confessing it to his father upon his return and to acknowledge his blameworthiness and his unworthiness. His will has decided for immediate action and he carries out his decision. Faith in his father had crystallised his decision and it carried him all the way from the far country to his father's home.

His reception and the state in which he found himself following it was beyond that which he had dared to expect as he had contemplated his arrival at home. To be a hired servant

was his greatest aspiration and even for that he was unworthy. The father's commands overwhelm him: "Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again."

It is a very natural and easy thing to supply what it all meant to the son and what his new state consisted in. He had sought deliverance from sin and its misery and degradation and had found it. He had regarded the happiness, peace and satisfaction of the hired servants a thing to be desired and sought; he had been received as a son of his father.

The efficient cause of his reception and the state consequent upon it may be traced to the work of his father. The co-efficient cause is the action of the son, which action was preceded by its psychological process as the account indicates. They are bound together, and in order that the reception might take place and become a reality both are necessary. According to the narrative, they are as indispensable and as inseparable as the two sides of a shield.

It is not surprising that Dr. Benjamin Jowett regarded the conversions to primitive Christianity as sudden, for a cursory scrutiny of them would lead one to such a conclusion, but a more careful study of them reveals the fact that there are examples

of gradual conversion without struggle, among the New Testament experiences. A typical instance of this type of experience is that of Lydia, whose conversion reached its consummation while Paul was preaching at Philippi. We shall allow the writer of the Acts to bring the facts before us; "And on the sabbath we went forth without the gate by a river side, - where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women that were come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized and her household, she besought us saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." Acts 16:13-15. Here is a splendid example of a gradual conversion unaccompanied by any struggle or acute personal suffering. Lydia went to the place of prayer, where she had been in the habit of worshipping God according to the knowledge she had. She heard Paul preach his evangelical missionary gospel. The Divine Initiator, who had already been at work in her life, aids at this time, when the 'Lord opened her heart' and she became receptive to further truth. She yielded to it and received baptism and was ready to enter upon Christian service, in offering the hospitality of her house to these missionaries of the gospel. This instance of conversion

indicates gradual progress marked by thought, deliberation and decision in following the light which she had received both at this time and previously. There is no indication of an acute sense of sin and guilt but a quiet consciousness of it and of the new life offered; there is no ecstatic joy, but one on reading the account is aware that a peace and satisfaction pervaded the soul, which is made evident in a decision to have a part in Christian work.

Paul regarded Timothy's Christian experience as having its beginning in the experiences of his grandmother. We can infer from this that Timothy's religious experience, began very early in life; indeed, that its definite beginning is not well marked in point of time but had always been in the entail of sincere faith which descended upon him from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. This certainly was a case of a gradual untroubled conversion-process without struggle which reached its final culmination in a ratification of the earlier faith after the age of accountability had been reached.

The teaching of the New Testament has not dealt with adolescent conversion. There is nothing to lead us to infer that it was an experience which was essentially different from adult conversion. However, there would be a difference in circumstances between the heathen father who heard the gospel first under Paul's preaching, and the child who heard it in the home, as

well as in public worship. The psychological process terminating in decision for God would be likely to be more marked and impressive in the case of the father than that of the child.

The conversion of Cornelius is important in New Testament teaching both because it is an instance of a gradual conversion which is marked by several steps in progress and also because this conversion is the initial step toward a definite reception of the Gentiles to Christianity. It is only the first phase of its importance that concerns us directly, the other one having a historical effect upon New Testament conversion.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a proselyte to Judaism a man, who, with all the members of his household, already feared God. This leader of the Italian band possessed a charitable spirit and gave alms to the people and spent much time in prayer to God. His seeking mind and continual desire for the highest and best in religion has already led him and his entire household to espouse the Jewish religion. He is prompted by a vision to send to Jaffa for Peter that his seeking and inquiring mind may receive further enlightenment. The historical facts of the narrative do not preclude the inference that he had previous information about Peter and the new life which he preached. His vision tended to crystallise his desire to know more of God and led to a decision to obey its promptings and to send for Peter. The Spirit of God was also working in the

heart of Peter to prepare him for his mission to this man who stood knocking at the door of Christianity. The Apostle recognized the interpretation to his own vision in the arrival of the committee bringing an invitation from the Roman centurion. Cornelius was awaiting the arrival of his messengers and his anticipated guest. The Apostle's sermon, shortly after his arrival, was prefaced by explanations on the part of both Peter and Cornelius - Peter indicating that he was entering the house of a man from another nation under the impulsion of a Divine commission; Cornelius explaining that he had asked him to come to a non-Jewish house under a similar impulsion and inviting the Apostle to enlighten them immediately as to the new way of life. Peter's sermon was concerning Jesus and the way to the new life through faith in Him. Before it was completed the conversion of Cornelius and his household had taken place and there was evidence of the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. Then followed their baptism, which in the New Testament is the seal of the conversion experience (Acts 10: 47).

As we have already seen in the preceding chapter Paul was fully conscious that the one barrier between God and man was sin. It had such an effect upon man's life that he was powerless against it while he remained in his unregenerate state. The failure of the law effectively to remove the barrier and lead to perfect righteousness before the final Judgement of God had

plunged Paul into a state of unrest and anguish of soul bordering on despair (Rom. 7: 24). How long this may have preceded the conversion crisis we do not know. During this time what was his attitude of mind toward Jesus of Nazareth? The historical narrative assures us that Paul was conspicuously active in the persecution of the early Christians. We have already observed that he knew something of the life and teaching of Jesus. He was present at the stoning of Stephen and witnessed the dramatic end of this loyal follower. Is it possible for a man who was at or about this time possessed with a consuming desire for perfect righteousness before God, to witness the wonderful self-possession of the martyr, without its leaving some impression upon his mind? We cannot know if there was any conscious, positive preparation taking place in his mind preceding the experience on the way to Damascus. There is one question which is of importance - did Saul the persecutor ever doubt the justice of his persecution? Were there moments when he regarded Jesus of Nazareth as more than the ordinary rebel against the orthodox Jewish teaching? There may have been a time of qualms of conscience. It seems to me that there are two good reasons for believing that Paul, the persecutor, may have been sharply aware of his conscience sitting in judgment upon his acts of persecution. The first evidence comes from the epistles and is an inference from the fact that he introduces

the use of the term conscience as a definite factor in his writing and teaching. He uses the term "suneidesis" twenty times. He uses it to describe the faculty which passes judgment upon an action after it is done. (Rom. 2:15. II Cor. 4:2. I Cor. 10:23 f.). The teaching of the Epistles is regarded as growing largely out of his personal experience in conversion.<sup>1</sup> It is quite probable that his doctrine of conscience received a great impetus in his own experience as his judgment condemned the acts of persecution in which he was engaged. But would not this deter him? It seems rather to have done the opposite, to have spurred him on; and incensed at his failure to arrest all before they escaped Jerusalem he starts out in pursuit. The state of his mind is that of 'one exceedingly mad' against the followers of Jesus. Now we all know from psychological introspection that it is entirely possible to entertain a state of mind such as this and yet be under condemnation of conscience - at times to have moments of indecision and a consciousness that ultimately it may all be a mistake, but yet to insist that the present course must be pursued. His state then must have been one of fury alternating with doubt and indecision. In what other way can we interpret the historical facts? In Acts 26:11 the record tells us that Paul strove to make the Christians blaspheme at the time of punishment in the synagogues, and that in great

1. "The Theology of the Epistles," by H.A.A. Kennedy, p.68 ff.



wrath he sought a commission to persecute them in foreign cities. On his way to Damascus, prostrated at noon-day by a light above the ordinary sunshine, he heard a voice inquiring the reason for this continual persecution and informing him: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." What are the goads or pricks of the goads? We know that it is a metaphor. To what does it refer? Does it refer to a struggle which began within Paul when the question, "Why persecutest thou me", was asked. Such an interpretation seems untenable. Psychological processes do not become intense in that manner or in that space of time. Had the Spirit ever presented the claims of Jesus as the Messiah and the solution of Paul's problem, before this time? We shall never know, but we may form conjectures. Something had taken place psychologically within Paul to which this metaphor refers. One writer<sup>1</sup> on the subject says 'that Luke had heard from Paul himself that before his conversion he had been like a ploughing ox kicking against the goad, furiously striving against the will of the driver and thereby only inflicting wounds on itself.' Without entering into any discussion as to whether this writer has done justice to the historical statements of the case, let us grasp the value of the metaphor used by Paul and regard it as referring to his inward soul - striving and struggling for goodness. What was the proper procedure for him, what was his

1. The Religious Experience of St. Paul, Percy Gardner, p.27,28.

right religious course, he had not yet determined. It was determined by his vision on the way to Damascus, in which the Messiah Jesus was manifested to him. When he saw Jesus his whole attitude was changed. From that time he was a Christian and was willing, nay, had a consuming desire to do that which he knew to be in accord with the will of God through Jesus Christ.

The Philippian jailor has frequently been portrayed by popular evangelical theologians as a hard-hearted wretch, who had cruelly treated Paul and Silas by casting them into the inner prison and thrusting their feet in the stocks. This is uncalled for. The fact is that we know nothing about the man's previous life nor what sort of character he was except what may be inferred from the fact that he was a jailor. The unusual experience during the night which followed the evening worship of Paul and Silas, was the preliminary preparation for the jailor's conversion. The fact that Paul and Silas and others might have escaped during the earthquake, had they desired, but made no attempt to do so, would serve as a preparation of mind resulting in a readiness to hear Paul and Silas. Indeed the jailor sought the way of salvation, shortly after he was hindered from taking his own life, which was the natural thing for him to do, following the custom of the times. If prisoners escaped when entrusted to a jailor, he forfeited his life as a penalty.

Few jailors ever awaited the execution orders. Suicide was the chosen alternative. Thus Paul and Silas had saved his life by informing him that the prisoners were all safe. So affected was he, that he sought the presence of Paul and Silas in the inner dungeon and trembling with fear fell down before them and inquired, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The only sentence of the reply to his question which is recorded by the writer of the Acts is the oft-quoted one, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved." But we must not overlook the fact that a period of time had elapsed between the asking of the question and the conversion of the jailor which is described by the writer as being occupied by the apostles, 'speaking the word of the Lord unto him and all that were in his house.' This period of instruction resulted in the conversion of the jailor and his house and was followed by their baptism. Acts of kindness were shown to Paul and Silas; their stripes were washed and they were received into the house of the jailor for food; and he 'rejoiced greatly with all his house having believed God'.<sup>1</sup>

1. In this connection a present day example from the mission field of East Persia is very much to the point. The missionary, Mr. Steiner (whom I know intimately) in his annual report speaks of being impressed by the power of the Gospel message immediately to affect the lives of some listeners on first hearing and gives the following example. "One young man who had never heard the Christian story before, who was the son of the leading man of the village, made a very strong confession of his faith in Christianity, this at the close of our first meeting and in the presence of his father and six other men of the village." From the annual report of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of United States of America 1922-23, part II, p. 229.

Here is a conversion which in its recorded detail is much more sudden than even that of Paul. There is no recorded evidence that the jailor knew any thing of Paul and Silas or the new way of life which they preached. However, if only the historical facts be considered, they fail to explain why the jailor knew enough to ask of Paul and Silas the way to salvation. How did he have any conception of the new life or use the language which is ascribed to him? Either before he retired for the night they had preached to him and perhaps others or he had been a listener at one of the meetings held by Paul and Silas previous to their arrest. These men had been several days in the city and had made a number of converts whose conversions are not recorded in detail, but who are referred to by the writer of the Acts as the brethren. Acts 16:41.

The consciousness of sin and the consciousness of available divine help are the necessary psychological preparation in the New Testament out of which emerges the definite personal state of deliverance and freedom from sin and the state of union with Christ and sonship with God. The change of mind has two necessary phases of process - a negative and a positive, each of which has its distinguishable antecedent. Each process has its preparation and beginning in the consciousness which preceded it. The consciousness of sin leads into the negative process, i.e. turning from sin or changing the mind with reference to sin.

The consciousness of divine help leads into the positive process, i.e. turning to God or changing the mind with reference to God. These two processes of New Testament conversion are characterised in theological usage by two terms, repentance and faith. However, both of these words may easily be misunderstood psychologically because of their English translation in the Authorised and Revised Versions. On this account we prefer to designate the processes by the terms already suggested, negative and positive. As I make the analysis, I shall endeavour to determine the place each has psychologically in 'the change of mind.' That Jesus meant 'metanoia' to include both a negative and positive aspect of the process, there seems to be no doubt. To interpret it otherwise is to do the teaching of Jesus, as well as the entire New Testament, a decided injustice. Jesus called upon men to repent. If repentance in its literal and original meaning is what was meant, then Jesus was making a negative appeal to his hearers. He was calling upon them to turn only from sin, without appealing to them to turn to anything to take sin's place in their lives. This is not in harmony with His general teaching, which has a very positive aspect. In His appeal to men to change their minds He desired that they should change their minds not only about sin but about God. This is very evident from his teaching concerning sin and God. The danger of the negative process by itself alone is plainly taught

in the metaphor of the empty house. (Mt. 12:38-45). Had the process been completed the good Spirit would have been received, and the last state of the man would have been much better than the first. The Pharisees were undertaking to appropriate salvation through the negative side of the conversion process only, and Jesus' condemnation of their method is very evident throughout the Synoptics. The metaphor of the empty house is itself a condemnation of the folly of their method.

Throughout the Synoptics the corresponding substantive for *ἐπιστρέφειν* is *μετάνοια*.<sup>1</sup> They both refer to the same process.

We find the entire New Testament in accord with our position that conversion is both a negative and a positive process of changing the mind of man. The negative side of the process is very seldom mentioned alone, and when it is the positive side is always assumed. In James 5:19, the writer seems to refer to the negative aspect of the process only, when he says, "He who converteth a sinner shall cover a multitude of sins." Here the Greek form for the English word conversion is used and, as we recall, it always means a turning from something to something. This is found to be true in a further examination of the use of the word. "They turned to the Lord." (Acts 9:35.) Here the statement indicates only the positive phase of the process and

1. Commentary on Gospel of St. Matthew. McNeile, p. 26.

pre-supposes the negative phase. Both phases of the turning are expressed in Acts 14:15, when Paul says "We.....bring you good tidings that ye may turn from vain things unto a living God." That Paul recognised both phases or aspects of the process cannot be doubted when we read I.Thess.1:9. "Ye turned unto God from idols to serve the living and true God." Again the writer of the Acts puts into Paul's mouth these words expressing the purpose of his preaching the gospel, "That they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18.) The verb-form of 'metanoia' and the verb-form of conversion are sometimes used together for the sake of emphasis. "Repent and turn to God." (Acts 26:20.) The writer of I.Peter, 2:25 does not definitely state both sides of the conversion process, but his pre-supposition is that there are two aspects. "For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

#### THE NEGATIVE ASPECT OF THE CONVERSION PROCESS.

New Testament conversion is first a change of mind toward sin. This phase of the process may be analysed as a psychological change, running the full cycle of consciousness, involving the thinking, feeling and willing activities. We must keep in mind that it is not to be expected that we shall find these activities of consciousness clearly described in every conversion

mentioned in the New Testament. It is even too much to expect to find them clearly outlined and described as a process in any conversion. For the writers of the New Testament are not describing a psychological process for our benefit as part of their description of the convert entering into the new life. They are mentioning or making some description of a Christian experience. However, their teaching supplements the experiences just as the experience supplements and verifies what they taught, concerning the experience - and it is by going to the New Testament as a whole, seeking its truth concerning the experience as we have been trying to do, that we should get the best results

The convert's change of mind appears in New Testament conversion as a decisive act of will. Jesus pre-supposes the freedom of the will and the right to exercise it in making decisions. This is clearly shown when he calls upon men, "Repent ye." How can he expect them to 'change their minds' with reference to anything or anyone unless they have the power and freedom to do so? The responsibility is theirs and they must meet it. This does not necessarily mean that there can be no aid or influence in the process of changing the mind. Nor does it mean that the change is a blind act of will alone. The mind does not act so in genuine conversion. The change of mind is a rational process. It no doubt can be discovered that in some persons it will contain a greater emphasis on one phase of



activity of consciousness than another. But the act of will and intellect and feeling will be present in some proportion. It is not to be expected since the New Testament individuals give evidence of varied individuality and personality, that their conversion will contain the same characteristics and the same elements of consciousness, in the same proportion. Such a conclusion would be untenable for anyone who had carefully studied the New Testament.

The general means by which the conversion experience of the New Testament was brought about was by a new interest which resulted in a changed view of sin, and also of God and life. This new interest always centres around the personality of Jesus. Whether in the Synoptics, in the Acts, in Epistles or in the Fourth Gospel, it is Jesus who draws men: His works, His teaching, His personality. As we have already mentioned when men met Jesus, if they had not already been conscious of their need they immediately became conscious of it and gave thought to their condition and to a remedy for it. Jesus either in person or in testimony by another, was presented to the heart. He must actually be perceived, according to the New Testament, before the work begins. Looking upon Jesus, thinking upon His teaching to men, they saw reflected to them the sinful picture of their soul's condition, or in psychological terms the condition of their mind. This reflection seems to be all the more

outstanding to man's perceptive faculty as he contrasts his condition with another potential condition. The Prodigal Son could not refrain from reflecting upon his condition as a swineherd, and in contrasting it with one of the servants in the father's home. Paul frequently contrasted his inward condition with his ideal of perfect righteousness.

On this there follows closely the effect of the activity of thought and reflection. Thought and reflection move the feelings and man becomes penitent. Blameworthiness and a consciousness of the consequences to himself if he continues always in his sinful condition, break upon him and sorrow for sin results. There is sin-pain because of the nature of sin wilfully committed. There is sorrow because of the alienation which sin has brought about.

The Prodigal Son was sorry that sinful desires and a sinful life had alienated him from the father's love and the father's blessings. Paul knew the true value of penitence. 'Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry unto repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort..... For godly sorrow [i.e. penitence] worketh repentance.' II Cor. 7:9f. This feeling of sin-pain or penitence is an emotion. A well-known psychologist<sup>1</sup>

1. "The Groundwork of Psychology," G.T.Stout. pp.188-192. I am indebted to M.S.Fletcher in his work "The Psychology of the New Testament," ch.IX. for the suggestion of this treatment of an emotion. However, Mr. Fletcher interprets repentance very differently, and makes a different application of Prof. Stout's description of an emotion from mine.

has emphasized three general and essential characteristics of every emotion. Emotions 'however composite they may be', he says, '.....each contain, as unifying centre of the complex, a unique and irreducible element.' What is the unique and irreducible element in the penitent emotion of New Testament conversion? What is the unifying centre of the complex? The quality of sorrow tends to unify the feelings and to centre them upon the condition of self. Contrition may be regarded as the 'unique and irreducible element' in the emotion of penitence. Further, it must not be overlooked that 'emotions are the subjective attitudes toward an object.' In conversion, what is the object toward which the subjective attitude is directed? Directly, the subjective attitude is concerned with the condition of the self, but ultimately God is the object towards which the subjective attitude is directed in penitence. We are told in Acts 20:21 that the change of mind is in a theological sense toward God. It is repentance toward God. Paul confirms these words in II Cor. 7:9 when he speaks of "sorrow after a godly sort." It is sorrow for the condition of self and the acts of self, because these have been done in opposition to a loving purpose and in direct opposition to a father's desire and his will. Sorrow after a godly sort is sorrow which considers God as well as self. 'Godly sorrow worketh

repentance' unto salvation. That is, 'Godly sorrow' is a part of the process of the change of mind and an aid in the process an essential part or Paul would not give it the prominence which it receives in this passage. But sorrow-of-the-world is equivalent to shame because of sin and its consequences. This is selfish and in Paul's words results in death.

In the third place, all typical emotions are an aid in the "directions or conation-trends of activity." Godly sorrow or penitence is always regarded by the New Testament as pouring in upon the will and moving it to action. The self now turns from sin. The process of the change of mind is completed in the decision that a life of sin or any phase of sin within the self is not the highest and best condition of selfhood. Sin is then forsaken. The words of the Prodigal Son are very characteristic and reveal the decision of the will to forsake sin, "I will arise and go." The direction is determined, it is to be away from sin. I will forsake sin and the sinful life. It is a turning from sin. It is a change of mind consisting in a decision of will and resulting in a change of attitude towards sin.

### The Positive Aspect of the Conversion Process.

Parallel to this negative process is the positive process. The positive process, logically, might be said to begin where the negative process ends. Perhaps it would be better to say that when the mind is changed with reference to sin or when, in the New Testament phraseology, the individual turns from sin, he turns towards God. But it is possible to conceive of the negative process without the positive. However, in the New Testament teaching these two aspects of the conversion process are so closely knit together that it is only for the purpose of psychological analysis that we undertake to separate them. They may be going on at the same time and in a sense act and interact upon each other. However, the positive can never be fully completed until the negative process has first been completed. It is in a sense dependent for complete success upon the success of the negative process.

When Jesus began His ministry among men He found in the consciousness of man a very unsatisfactory view of God. Unsatisfactory in that it did not permit men to see God as He is and desires to be in His relation to man and man's relation to Him. Jesus took the Old Testament idea of God, and elevated and enriched and purified it. He did this in a way which man could comprehend and understand once he realised

what He was trying to do for him. In fact to clarify and to change their minds about God was the primary purpose of His ministry. He does not seek to define God. What he does desire is that man may know what is the relationship between man and God, and how God acts in establishing this relationship and in maintaining it and what part man has in the process.

This larger, fuller, clearer conception of God is most important in our study of conversion. It has its part to play upon the consciousness of the individual in the inception of the negative process. But it plays a very important part in the positive process. Man's mind is changed toward God, by what to him is a new conception of God. God is, in Jesus' teaching, Father of the individual, not of the nation. The Father has given Jesus to man to reveal many things to him. Primarily, to reveal to him the way from sin to God. We have already said that no New Testament conversion or conversions are recorded which do not indicate that the individual had seen Jesus and through Him had become conscious of the way to the Father. This perception of Jesus and changed view of God seems to have had its place in every conversion. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Should we dare to think for an instant that Jesus meant that "whoever has looked upon my physical self has seen the Father, even God?" Did He not rather mean that "Whoever has grasped what my relation to the

Father means to me and has actually seen me and understands me, has seen the Father, for I am revealing the Father." Here is the intellectual content if one wishes to speak of it in terms of activity of consciousness. All this was very plainly stated by Jesus, yet men did not grasp what He was actually trying to do for them until He had sealed the atonement He was making for man with God, by giving His own life. When this conception was grasped by man, evidence of the change of mind was forthcoming immediately. This activity of consciousness is frequently called faith as belief; "a great number that believed turned unto the Lord"(Acts 11:21). No matter what we call it, it is a real part of the positive process of the New Testament conversion. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek after Him"(Heb.11:6).

This activity of consciousness releases the feeling of faith which in the New Testament is faith par excellence. However impossible it is to overlook the part that the intellect has played in the conversion process, we must not look upon it as sufficient (James 2:19).

Faith is the characteristic emotional element of the positive process of the New Testament conversion. We can do no better in describing it than analyse it into the characteristic elements which we used in describing the emotion of

penitence. The 'unifying centre of the complex', the 'unique and irreducible element is trust. We are left in no doubt as to the object toward which the feeling ~~as~~ trust is a subjective attitude. It is trust in God through Christ. This feeling of trust or saving faith predominates in the New Testament teaching on the subject of conversion. This is not surprising when we recall the important place which faith as trust holds in our daily lives. Intellectual belief as we have seen is the natural ground for this trust and aids in releasing it and later in justifying the action springing from the emotions. But the quality of this emotion is found in its trust and confidence in the object toward which it is a subjective attitude, i.e. God. The importance which the new Testament writers give to this feeling of trust as the irreducible element of true faith is clear enough in the original Greek, but it is obscured somewhat in the English versions. The difficulty again is to find a word adequate to that which is best expressed by a phrase. The translators employ the word 'believe' where the meaning is evidently 'to have faith in.' Thus the intellectual and the emotional content are often much confused by the English readers of the new testament. In the many places where the versions translate 'believe in' or 'believe on', the feeling of confidence or trust is that which is emphasised rather than any intellectual



activity. We can see the true meaning shining through such passages as "He that believeth on Him is not judged" (Jn. 3:18). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). "Ye believe God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). "To him that....believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned unto righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). These are but a few of the representative passages. These passages all presuppose a knowledge of the object of faith, or the feeling of trust would not have become a part of consciousness. That such knowledge was considered as essential and necessary is plainly evident from the attitude of the new Testament writers. "He preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23), "this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we proclaim" (Col. 1:27). This substantiates our position that an intellectual factor always enters into the conversion in some proportion. This does not necessarily mean that the conversion was predominantly an intellectual one, nor does it mean that the individual in the New Testament who was converted pondered over the knowledge and new conception which he had of God through Christ for days or weeks before he released a sufficient feeling of trust, that the process might proceed to its completion. The entire cycle of consciousness may be accomplished in a small fraction of time.

The third characteristic of the faith emotion is its link with "directions or conation-trends of activity." As the pain of sin set the will in action in turning from sin, so faith in God sets the will in action toward God and the individual turns to God. Faith and obedience are very closely connected in the New Testament. Paul speaks of the gospel being made known unto obedience of faith (Rom.16:26). He says with reference to his own conversion - "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." In many passages the New Testament faith in Jesus Christ is made prominent, no doubt, because Jesus is looked upon as being the manifestation of God the Father; thus faith becomes faith in a person and results in cessation of dependence on one's own attempts at reaching one's goal and a transference of trust from ourselves to another - God in Christ.

The process is complete as far as man is concerned when his will has decisively acted in turning to God. This will-action involves more than might be evident at first sight. It involves the abandonment of all selfish ambitions as such. It is self-surrender in the highest conception of the term. This self-surrender is equivalent to reception of Jesus Christ and all that involves. The content of self-surrender, as we can readily see, varies greatly with the capacity to receive. As a psychological process conversion is complete. The

cycle of the consciousness in thinking, feeling and willing in its two-fold aspect, negative and positive, has been accomplished. What takes place after man has made his response to faith, has decided for the new life of fellowship with God and has become entirely receptive to the influences and action of the Spirit, escapes our analysis and can only be observed in its fruits and results.

### The Consequent State.

The convert emerges from the conversion crisis into a state of consciousness marked by definite characteristics. The many metaphors and modes of speech used by the New Testament writers reveal the fulness and richness of the new state of life into which the convert emerges from conversion.

The state of the convert after the process of conversion, is described as 'a new life'. Paul uses a metaphor fully expressive of both the negative and the positive aspects of the process when he says "ye have put off the old man...and have put on the new man" (Col. 3:10). Paul believed that the human personality had the capacity for the conversion experience, and that it could as by divine alchemy, be changed from old to new. The natural man could become a spiritual personality. We do not merely infer that Paul looked upon the consequent state of the individual as a new personality; we have his own

words in which the new personality is described as 'a new creature' (Gal. 6:15). That the newly converted man is to be regarded as a new personality is assumed by all the writers of the new testament. The writer of the Fourth Gospel presupposes it when he refers to the necessity of the new birth. There cannot be a new birth except a new life be the result. The same assumption is made by the writer of I. Peter 1:3, and I. John 5:1,12).

The conversion of Paul is the most noteworthy in Christian history, and no other New Testament writer has analysed so carefully the state following the conversion process as has the converted Saul of Tarsus. Starting with the Pauline conception of the state of the converted man and comparing it with the variety of phrases used by the other new testament writers to describe the effect of conversion upon the human nature, we can describe a fairly harmonious view of the state of man consequent upon conversion.

Paul regarded man as passing into a new relationship with God as he entered into the new life and became a new personality.

The new creature is conscious of being justified before God and by God. It is beyond our purpose to enter into any theological discussion of justification. We deal with it only as a conviction present in the consciousness of a convert, and

describe it as an interpretation of a relation conceived of as existing after the experience has taken place. This state is best understood by contrasting it, as Paul does, with the state which preceded conversion. In his pre-conversion state, Paul describes man in legal phraseology, as standing accused before God. (Rom.8:33) In the new life, which is a new relationship to God in Christ, there is no danger of condemnation (Rom.8:1). Man who in sin was accused, in Christ Jesus becomes free from accusation and "unreprovable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor.1:8). Jesus desires to present the new personality "holy and....unreprovable before him" (Col.1:22). The convert comes into a possession of a righteousness of God in Christ (II Cor.5:21). The consciousness of justification psychologically described is equivalent to a consciousness of freedom and deliverance from sin or forgiveness of sin and a possession or righteousness. Elsewhere when Paul desires to describe the consciousness of the forgiveness of sin in the regenerate state he uses the metaphor of debt (Col.2:14). Man's position was that of the individual who is in debt. A bond had been written in ordinances which were against the sinner. This bond is blotted out, to use Paul's metaphorical terms, 'nailed to the cross.' The bondage of the law had held man in sin until Jesus by His life and death had blotted out the letter of the law and made forgiveness possible. It

is to Jesus Christ that men owe their forgiveness of sin (Col. 1:14, Apl.1:7, Col.2:13). Such a metaphor would no doubt be readily understood by many to whom Paul wrote. That the cancelling of a bond by blotting it out was a familiar fact to many seems assured from the many papyrus bonds which have recently been discovered. The regenerate man stands as one conscious of being relieved of a great burden, comparable to a heavy debt.

In describing man's previous state of sin and its grip upon him, Paul frequently makes use of the metaphor of slavery. Slavery was very common in his day. Some of the people with whom he came in contact in the Gentile missions had been slaves. One who was constantly striving to be all things to all men in order to save some of them, grasps the figure of the slave chained to his task by a cruel task-master and uses it as a perfect picture of the individual bound by sin. So stringent is the bondage and so strong the bonds, that it is impossible and useless for the slave in sin, to undertake to break away. A variety of phrases is used by Paul to vivify his picture of the condition in sin: "Ye were servants in sin (Rom.6:17); "Servants unto uncleanness"(Rom.6:19); "serving divers lusts and pleasures"(Titus 3:3). When he includes himself, he says, "We...were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world," no doubt referring to bondage under

the law. In reference to idols, he says, "ye were in bondage to them that by nature are no Gods (Gal.4:8). Freedom from sin is a characteristic of the new state. This redemption is described as being a product of our new life in Christ (In Rom.3:24), he refers to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God has delivered the converted man out of 'the power of darkness and translated him into the kingdom of the son of His love; in whom we have our redemption' (Col. 1:12-14). The convert who has been delivered from sin is just as free as the man who has bought by the purchase money according to the rules of manumission. The same thought of freedom through Christ is found in the Fourth Gospel: "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (Jn.8:36).

At other times a sinful man is conceived as living in a state of alienation from God. He is an enemy of God (Rom: 5:10). It was the sinful condition of his mind which alienated man from God (Col.1:21). When the mind of man is changed, the state of consciousness is one of reconciliation. The convert feels himself no longer estranged, but is on a new basis of friendly relation to God. This has been accomplished by means of the ministry of reconciliation of Christ (II.Cor.5:18,19). That which stood between man and God is no more.

Man has been received into a very close relationship with God, which we have just described in terms of a consciousness of a justified, forgiven, redeemed, reconciled state. The highest conception of the new relationship which, according to Paul, is present in the mind of the convert, is that he is conscious of having been received into the family of God. Paul mixes his figures of speech from time to time as he describes the convert in the family of God. When he is feeling his own unworthiness or desires to inspire humility in others, he interprets the consciousness as bond service to Christ (Gal.1:10). Nevertheless, the converts are free individuals, "For freedom did Christ set us free"(Gal.5:1). At other times he describes the new relation in that highest of all conceptions of man's relationship to God: "Thou art no longer a bond servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through Christ"(Gal.4:7). "For ye are all sons of God, through faith in Jesus Christ"(Gal.3:26). This new relationship Paul conceives as having been brought about by adoption into the family of God (Gal.4:5b).

The use of these metaphors is not confined to Paul. In the other writers of the New Testament also we find them used. Jesus pronounces forgiveness and justification upon the repentant sinner in the temple and describes the reconciliation and forgiveness of the Prodigal Son after his repentance.



At different times during His ministry, Jesus assured people of the forgiveness of their sins. In the reconciled and forgiven state, man is a son of God. The reality of this is taught by Jesus and emphasised by most of the New Testament writers. The writer of the Fourth Gospel says that "as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12). The action of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is very similar to this when he brings forth robes and shoes and a ring and restores to his wayward child the right to be called a son.<sup>1</sup>

This consciousness of deliverance from sin and of the new relation existing between man and God gives rise to an emotional state which is described in varied phraseology (Rom. 5:1,15,13). Many of the converts rejoice because of their experience. The eunuch, after his conversion and baptism, went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). The Philippian jailor made a feast for Paul and Silas and he and all his household rejoiced. The Apostle Paul describes the state of salvation to be righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom.14:17). The believers, having received salvation of their souls, are in a state "rejoicing with joy, unspeakable and full of Glory" (I. Peter 1:3-9). One

1. See also Heb.2:10 12, 5. 1 John 3:1.

record of crowd-conversion indicates that the state following the conversion was one of such ecstatic happiness that the converts appeared as though they were drunk with wine. An exuberancy of speech, called the gift of tongues, was sometimes a concomitant of this state. However, it does not appear to have been regarded by the apostles as an essential characteristic of the state. In the majority of the accounts of conversion, it is not mentioned. Paul, realizing it to be a non-essential element in religious experience, warned the Corinthian Church (I Cor.14:1-18) against laying too much emphasis upon it. The New Testament does not teach that any new element is added to the nature of man or that there is any change made in the constitutional nature of the convert or that he loses his own personality or identity; man rather is regarded as a new personality through being placed in a new relationship to God by a change of mind and the infusion of a new principle of life and action, in consequence of which (as we shall see later) he is enabled to exercise his faculties and control the activities of his consciousness in a new manner and direct them to new and different ends.

### The new Testament Causal Explanation.

Throughout the new Testament, it is everywhere implied that the Christian has experienced a definite inward change.<sup>1</sup> The new Testament writers make it very plain that man is unable to effect the change upon himself. We have already examined the need and the processes, so far as this is possible by which the need is supplied. That this need has not been met by man's own efforts we are already aware. Man has need of a power external to and other than himself to overcome the evil tendencies which are controlling his life in a more or less definite fashion. Over against the sin and weakness which we have observed, the quasi-personality which Paul felt to be throttling him, there appears the power of the Holy Spirit which is available for man's aid. The Holy Spirit is regarded as endowed with creative energy by means of which He infuses the converted man with a new principle of life. The new Testament writers regard the Holy Spirit as God in action. This power of the Holy Spirit is referred to by the New Testament writers in different terms: the Spirit of Christ (I.Pet.1:11, Phil.1:19); the Holy Spirit (I.Cor.2:13, 1 Pet. 1:12, Jn.7:39); the Spirit of God (I Cor.2:11,14, 12:3, Mt.12:28); the Spirit (Eph.5:18; Jn.6:63; Acts 2:4); the

1.I Cor.6:11, Eph.2:8, Col.1:12, I Jn.2:29, Jn.3:3ff, Mt.18:3.

Spirit of the Lord (II Cor.3:17, Lk.4:18). The New Testament writers regard this Divine Spirit as God in action in the human experience. They discovered through the manifestation in Jesus and the Pentecostal experience as well as by many other evidences that God is truly a Spirit (Jn.4:24). According to the New Testament, God is invariably the initiator in the work of salvation which is begun in man by conversion. No man can come into the new relationship except the Father draw him (Jn.6:47). Man is not represented in the New Testament as always aware when the Divine Spirit has taken the first step. However, it is made clear that it is the work of the Spirit that man be made conscious of sin and of righteousness. In addition to convicting men of sin, the Spirit seeks to lead them to know the truth (Jn.16:8-13). Thus God through Christ, in the activity of the Divine Spirit, is regarded in the New Testament as the effectual cause of man's new life (Col.1:21,22).

As we have already seen in our analysis of the process, man has a part in the process of salvation. Man's co-operation can best be described as a re-action to Divine initiation. Man reacts or responds to the contact and influences of the Divine Spirit upon his spirit. He throws open every channel for action that it may be permeated by divine activity, every disposition is submitted for rejuvenation or redirection,

every activity of consciousness is re-actuated by a new principle of life; in fact no part of man's self remains closed against the Divine Spirit. It is as though man has been living in a room only dimly lighted and has become conscious of the marvellous sunlight seeking admittance through the shutters. These are released and the room becomes flooded with sunlight. However, all such metaphors are too mechanical adequately to explain it, as we are well aware from the misunderstanding of the metaphors used by New Testament writers, which has been so prevalent in the past. Human re-action to divine initiative converts a sufficient cause into an efficient cause. Even man's faith is a re-action or response to the action of God. "Jesus answered and said unto them, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'" (Jn.6:29, Rom.1:5).

In bringing about man's conversion, the Divine Spirit makes use of subsidiary means. The Word, sometimes called the Gospel, and the testimony of the regenerate, are used as an instrument or means of influencing and aiding man in appropriating salvation. The efficacy of the word or gospel as the expression of the Divine mind is taught in the New Testament. Jesus says, "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." (Jn.6:63). Paul regarded his converts as begotten through the gospel (I Cor.4:15). The

writer of Hebrews rests his faith on 'the word of God' as that which is 'living and powerful' (Heb.4:12). This causality of the divine word is taught by many New Testament writers: "begotten again...through the word of God" (1 Pet.1:23); "God...called you through our Gospel" (1 Thess.2:13, Rom.1:16). The power of God is regarded as becoming effective unto the new life through knowledge of God (11 Pet.1:2-4).

Leaders of primitive Christianity regarded themselves as used of the Divine Spirit that the new life might come to man. Through them, God communicated the gospel message to others. They became witnesses of the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus sent the apostles forth on a mission which was to aid in bringing repentance and remission of sins to those who should re-act favourably to their message (Lk.24:44-49). Paul was called on a similar mission which extended to the Gentiles (Rom.1:1, Gal.1:1). The New Testament writers assume that man may aid God through the guidance of the Spirit and the aid of the word, in preparing the human mind for conversion (James.5:20, Acts 13:47). Nevertheless, it is the goodness of God which brings man into the new life (Rom.2:4), it is He that giveth repentance (Acts 11:18), and the birth of the new life is from above or through the action of the Spirit (Jn.3:3ff)

### Comparison and Criticism.

The gradual Christian conversions, described by psychology, do not differ materially from those of the New Testament, except that the New Testament experiences do not give definite evidence of the determined struggle shown by the gradual experiences described by psychology. The absence of this characteristic is especially true in the case of Lydia, whose conversion seems to have been not only gradual but without apparent struggle.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the case of Cornelius might be interpreted as indicating the presence of determined seeking. Had the mind of Cornelius not been engrossed with the new way of life, it scarcely seems possible that he would have had the vision. The fact that this element is not emphasised in the record is no doubt due to the omission of detail of the conversion experience.

The seemingly sudden cases of psychology's description, and the New Testament record have many of the same characteristics. The elements of struggle and of surrender are present in both the cases of psychology and the New Testament. Paul has been regarded by some as an example of spontaneous awakening, but his own testimony to the decision of will to obey the heavenly vision would preclude such a classification. The spontaneous awakening class appear to be absent from the experience of the New Testament. The

1. See p. 143.

burden of proof appears to show that a process always takes place in a positive decision of will. This process may be of short duration or it may extend over a period of time. It may even take place as a process of home training, as in the case of Timothy. Man's conscious contribution in the New Testament conversion is a decision to turn from sin to God, reached through a psychological process of consciousness.

There are two divergences of special importance between the psychological analysis of conversion and that of New Testament conversions. The first is psychology's classification of faith as a non-essential element in the conversion process; the second is the use of the subconscious as a sufficient and efficient cause of conversion. We must postpone a discussion of the second of these until our final chapter, because we have to note psychology's use of the subconscious in our intervening chapter. Then, when we have all the facts before us, we shall give our attention to a consideration of the value of the two divergent causal explanations.

What do James and Leuba mean when they say that faith is a non-essential and is merely accessory as a part of the conversion process? They are talking about reliance on an intellectual faith.<sup>1</sup> It is a belief in creeds, either on the

1. James' Varieties, p.246.



authority of others, or on the authority of one's own reason. Their contention is something like this - "the conceptual belief about Christ's work," though it may at times be efficacious and antecedent, is really accessory and non-essential. They regard the conviction of the convert that he is saved, that all is well with him, as faith. This places faith outside the conversion process and makes it a characteristic of the consequent state. That it is a part of this state is unquestionable. That the New Testament converts were assured that all was well with their souls there can be no doubt. But how did they arrive at that state of assurance? They saw Jesus. They focussed their attention upon Him and their apprehension of Him inspired faith or trust in Him and God the Father through Him. We have previously emphasised the fact that every New Testament conversion has as its antecedent knowledge of Jesus. Knowledge of Jesus becomes that which engrosses the mind in its activity in the positive aspect of conversion, and affects the negative aspect in its interaction. If psychologists had made a more careful examination they would have discovered that every genuine Christian conversion has its intellectual content. It has a content of belief concerning Christ. It may not be thought out as an elaborate creed, it need not be. But it is sufficiently definite to become the beginning of the positive phase of the conversion

which is followed by personal trust and a decision of will. While psychology has made no attempt to analyse conversion in its negative and positive aspects, yet they are quite prominent in much of the work of psychology. The individual is described, for example, as trying to be free from a certain actual self or state of self-hood and to come into a possession of a more desirable state of self-hood. This is not unlike turning from what New Testament always describes as sin, to God or the new life in God through Christ. Faith as an intellectual or knowing element of modern conversion comes into the consciousness of the convert in many cases years before conversion, and has its repository in memory and lends its aid at the time of conversion. The intellectual content of the adolescent convert has had a gradual and almost continual accretion of Christian knowledge until the time when it arouses sufficient emotional faith to move the will to decision. Psychology's mistake has lain in expecting that the object of faith should have had a presentation in the immediate pre-conversion period. There is no necessity for this.

Psychology has obviously made the mistake of confusing the faith of the process of conversion with that of the consequent state. This has resulted in psychology limiting faith only to the state following the conversion process.

Faith as personal trust is found as an element in many of the responses used by the psychologists, from which they concluded it belonged only to the consequent state.<sup>1</sup> It requires faith to seek conversion and to continue to seek it, while passing through acute struggle; it requires faith to pray, and prayer has a large place in many modern conversions; it requires faith to make the surrender of self which occupies such a large place in the conversion experiences; it requires conscious faith to accept the new life after it is presented to consciousness as a complex, prepared, outside consciousness, as psychology contends, and until the new life becomes the accepted state of the conscious self the process is not complete. Faith has a part in the conversion process, as well as a place in the state consequent upon it.

1. James' Varieties, p.202ff, also Appendix to Leuba's 'The Psy. of Rel. Phenomena'.

## Chapter VI.

### The Results of the Conversion Experience.

#### Part I.

It is commonly believed that the converted man possesses something which the non-religious person lacks. He appears to be more at home in life, viewed as a whole, and he seems to be and acts as though he were in touch with forces external to himself. This inclines us to ask, has conversion given him something which he did not previously possess? In what way is he different from what he was before the experience? Has conversion proved itself to be of any permanent value? These are some of the questions we ask psychology; how does it answer them?

There appears to be no doubt that a new spiritual force comes into the life, a new vitality is received. Impossible things become possible and new energies and greater endurance are discernible. The transformation and change brought about by the process is great, whether it comes gradually or suddenly, no matter what elements appear to have dominated it or what has been the pre-conversion experience.

One of the most important and most impressive things about the conversion experience is its results in the character of the convert. We shall notice first what is the effect upon the inmost tendencies and attitudes of life. As

we examine the analysis which psychology has made, we find that persons who were noticeably self-centred before conversion come into a closer relation and sympathy with the outside world. The experience affects their relation to persons, to nature, to God and Christ. They have an interest in and a desire to be of assistance to others. They forget themselves and their own selfish interests. Frequently they are anxious to have others receive the same new life which has become theirs. They are now capable of great self-sacrifice and self-denial. Along with this, goes what at first sight may seem like an entirely contradictory element, that of an awakening of self. The self-consciousness is increased and the convert becomes aware of his own worth. This is not in any selfish way or activity, but in a consciousness of the place that the self has in the world and of what he can do in the way of righteousness. Thus selfhood and freedom assert themselves. In this way, the self does not minister to or encourage selfishness, but rather tends to destroy it.

Following conversion and resulting from it is the birth of new powers. The quotations referring to the new powers of the convert indicate mental clarification, greater spiritual interest and insight, stronger will-power, quickened emotions; they indicate that the inmost purposes and habits of life have altered and changed, often in a way impossible and

unattainable before. After genuine conversion there is always evidence that life is lived on a higher plane and that power has been received to make this possible. There have been transformations from evil to goodness, and others not so deep in sin have been lifted to a new level, which is frequently described by them as a closer relation to God. The records show that conversion has done much for those who could do nothing for themselves. It has changed their lives, from loathsome degradation and worthlessness, to respectability and worth. It has rescued them from habits which have held them in a vice-like grip. Such habits were often formed early in life and despite earnest and frequent efforts, no power within themselves seemed able to free them from their grip. The results of conversion found in the data of the psychologists are often of a miraculous nature, and it is not strange that a supernatural character has been ascribed to them by some who have experienced conversion. There is no other experience of man that has so transformed his whole being and so affected his whole life as the conversion experience has done for those who have experienced its genuine work. Certain phases of an individual's make-up, mental and other, have been touched by experiences after the nature of conversion but not in the complete way that conversion has worked its transformation.

In a sentence or two on each case, let us notice some of the concrete results of a few experiences, particularly those whose habits have been vicious. The case of Col. Gardiner<sup>1</sup> is that of a man in the grasp of sexual temptation, "I was effectually cured of all inclination to that sin I was so strongly addicted to that I thought nothing but shooting me through the head could have cured me of it; and all desire and all inclination to it was removed, as entirely as if I had been a sucking child; nor did the temptation return to this day." There are no more striking examples than those of converted drunkards. Mr. S. H. Hadley, who after his conversion became an active and successful rescuer of drunkards in New York City, says, in referring to his conversion, "From that moment till now I have never wanted a drink of whiskey."<sup>2</sup> The Oxford graduate, a confirmed drunkard from a lad, says, "From that hour drink has had no terror for me; I never touch it, never want it."<sup>3</sup> Another respondent of Leuba's, was occupied with drink, profanity, cards and the vilest forms of amusement, was released by conversion from the desire for any of them.<sup>4</sup> Want of space forbids a further consideration of the personal testimony of converts. James and Leuba, as well as others, have given numerous illustrations and have made reference to many cases in proof of the value of conversion

1. James' varieties, p.269. 2. Ibid. p.202. 3. Leuba, p.375.  
4. Ibid. p.378f.

results.

These results may be summed up in a general statement; conversion gives power over evil habits and tendencies and yields a changed character. This is an invariable result of every genuine conversion. Psychologists acknowledge these victories and find difficulty in explaining them. These, along with the other phases of the experience difficult of explanation, are referred to the subconscious. Pratt<sup>1</sup> explains conversion as being of the nature of a change of taste and values which the most normal and commonplace of us notice taking place within us in almost every stage of life, but perhaps more particularly during that period commonly called adolescence. There is nothing so mysterious as some writers of popular psychology would have us think. It is just like changing from a child's liking for "Dixie" played by a brass band, to an adult's delight in Beethoven's music played by a symphonic orchestra. The cause of such a change is the whole of one's musical education and still more the whole of one's mental development. It is an unconscious or subconscious process. The consciousness of the individual may have become aware of the fondness for Beethoven at some particular concert, or the presence of the fondness may have gradually grown upon his consciousness. Pratt thinks that it will happen most

1. Religious Consciousness, Pratt, p.16 Off.



frequently the latter way, and that usually the individual will not be able to give any particular date when the liking for Beethoven really began. This is entirely logical and consistent with his desire to make the gradual conversion experience the normative one. He says, "Conversion follows the same laws as a change of taste - because, in the last analysis it is itself a change of taste - the most momentous one that ever occurs in human experience."

James<sup>1</sup> and Leuba<sup>2</sup> have contradictory views about the converted man and the natural man. James holds that converted men as a class are not distinguishable from natural men, and that some natural men in their fruits excel some converted men. He contends that if there is such a difference as Jonathan Edwards claims, i.e. that the converted man is an entirely different man from a natural man, partaking as he does directly of Christ's substance, then there ought to be some distinguishing class-mark, 'some distinctive radiance attaching even to the lowest specimen of this genus,' to which no one would remain insensible, and which so far as it went, would prove him more excellent than even the most gifted among mere natural men.' Leuba draws attention to the fact that the conviction that between the morally righteous man

1. James' Varieties, p.237f. 2. Leuba, p.362.

and the true disciple of Christ there is a specific difference, is deeper than ever. He asserts that psychology as well as theology recognizes such a distinction; that conversion does make a difference between men, between those who have experienced it and those who have not.

That the results of the conversion experience are of value seems quite evident, but are they permanent? In their permanence, since they have been found to have inherent worth, will lie their greatest value. James says that all the conversions which he has used as data have been permanent and that many of them have been followed by lives of outstanding usefulness and service. It is scarcely to be expected that the individual will remain at the high level attained in the experience. Men are prone to lapse from every level, no matter in what sphere it is attained, but such a lapse following conversion is found to be more of the nature of a fluctuation than of that which is commonly called backsliding - a term usually used to denote a return to a former state, a complete falling away from the new life. But not all conversions are genuine and permanent, as we can see from a comparison which Starbuck has made.<sup>1</sup> The comparison is made between converts from a revival conducted by a professional

1. Ibid. p.170.

evangelist and those converted in regular church life, resulting from influences of home, Sunday School and special services by the pastor of the church. From 92 who professed conversion under professional evangelism, 62 dropped away before six weeks, 15 of the remaining ones relapsed later and at the time of the report only 12 from the 92 were in good standing in their church life. From 68 converts in the regular church work, 16 dropped away before six weeks, 10 relapsed later, and at the time of the report 41 were in good standing. The revival just referred to was one which from my knowledge of American professional evangelism, I should class as the over-heated variety. Starbuck gives this comparison in his chapter on "The Abnormal Aspects of Conversion," and I am sure he must have felt much the same about it. Conversions from such a revival are not the kind of conversion upon which American psychology has made its general analysis.

Starbuck has also gathered some statistics<sup>1</sup> on the permanency of conversion. His report embraces 100 cases, all of them evangelical church members. . According to their own testimony there had been lapses of some sort in nearly all of the cases. Ninety-three per cent. of the women and seventy-seven per cent. of the men reported lapses. But in discussing

1. Starbuck, p.356ff.

the report, this psychologist says that on examination, these cases were found to show not complete falling away but only a fluctuation, the persons concerned still retaining their connexion with the faith they had espoused. There were only six per cent. of the entire number who fell away entirely and in whose lives conversion results were not permanent. His conclusion is that "The effect of conversion is to bring with it a changed attitude toward life which is fairly constant and permanent, although the feelings may fluctuate." Again he says, "The persons who have passed through conversion, having once taken a stand for the religious life, tend to feel themselves identified with it, no matter how much their religious enthusiasm declines."<sup>1</sup>

Thus we find that psychology looks upon the resultant effects of genuine conversion as being of the proper quality and of great benefit to those who experience it, and that it is an experience which is quite permanent and lasting in its effect upon the life of the convert.

1. *ibid.* p.360.

## Part II.

### The Resultant Effects of New Testament Conversion.

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One experiences genuine surprise on first becoming aware of the lack of definite conversion results in the record of the gospels. The conversions during Jesus' ministry were not very numerous, and they appear not to have been very deep. This is most perceptible during the trial and suffering of Jesus. At one time He appears to have been forsaken, not only by all His followers and disciples, but by the twelve as well. It was one of the inner circle who denied Him; it was one of the twelve who betrayed Him into the hands of His enemies. This was no doubt due largely to misunderstanding of His real mission and misinterpretation of His message. Genuine conversion and conversion results appear, rather, to have followed His death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit confirmed the former religious experience of the disciples of Jesus, and firmly established their trust in God through Christ. In the consciousness of the resurrection and the experience which followed it, the disciples came into an understanding of Jesus' mission and message to the world, and the change of mind which He had taught became to them a reality. The results of genuine conversion immediately became evident.

The conversion to primitive Christianity resulted in five definite characteristics of the new life: a change of character; a new faith; an enlightened and deepened consciousness of God; a personal fellowship; and augmented power in the individual life.

### A Change of Character.

In a previous chapter we have taken cognisance of the fact that conversion is in its nature a radical change, but in this chapter it is our purpose to examine in more detail the change of character which is a consequence of conversion.

There is no more definite feature in the change of character than the change of disposition or personal taste.

In Jn.3:19f, the evil-minded individual is portrayed as one hating light and truth but in direct contrast to this is the one who loves truth and light and whose deeds reveal that 'they are wrought in God.' Jesus made memorable the place of this result among those that are most important when He declared; "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Lk.16:13). Hence we can readily see it is a change from hate to Love.

Just how definite and radical the change of character was

in the New Testament conversions is to be seen from the many references made to the former condition of certain of the numerous converts and its contrast with their present character. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that their conversion had resulted in their turning from idol worship to that of the true God (1.Thess.1:9). He writes to the church at Corinth counselling them to keep free from fornication, idolatry, adultery, self-abuse, thievery, covetousness, drunkenness and extortion, warning them that such as do these things do not inherit the kingdom of God, and also remarking that of such a character some of them had been, but were no more, since the change in their life and heart (1.Cor.6:9ff).

The positive consequences of the change of character are to be seen in the fruits of the Spirit as he works in and through the new creature, manifesting love, joy, peace, long-suffering gentleness, goodness, meekness and self-control (Gal.6:22,23).

Paul himself is the premier illustration of a character changed through conversion. He was not one who was changed from outward and flagrant sin, like some of his converts, but one who had persecuted the very sect with which he later associated himself, and who from the leading persecutor became, through conversion, the leading Christian. The change is from sin in some form or state, to righteousness and love for

God and fellowship with Him.

Conversion made a man more loving in the sense in which Jesus was loving; less self-centred and more thoughtful of others. In short it makes the character more Christ-like and gives the life a new and different goal toward which to strive. Such is the change which New Testament conversion makes in the moral character of the individual.

#### A New Faith.

So positive and energizing does the new life seem that it can well be described as a life of faith. A faith or confidence first of all that deliverance and freedom have been effected and that the soul has entered into a new atmosphere and breathes a new air. A faith that "all things work together for good", to them that love God.

The life of faith which the Christian leads and rejoices in, is one of personal trust in God through Christ. It is no mere assent to a credal form of doctrine; it is an identification with Jesus Christ in thinking, feeling and willing. It is a personal relationship and communion which is as intimate and real as was the personal relationship of Jesus in His communion with the Father. Paul's memorable speech on Mars' Hill is in complete accord with the teaching of his Epistles, except that to cultured Greeks he speaks of God rather than through Christ or in Christ when he says,



"In Him we live and move and have our being."

Faith finds its greatest ally in Paul. This new faith which results from conversion is in perfect accord with goodness and good works. It is in good works that living vital faith gives evidence of its being. Just as a state of sin within will make itself known, so will faith reveal itself. Thus faith which does not reveal itself is called 'dead' faith - that is unreal faith. It is not a faith that sustains spiritual and moral vigour and life. It is not living faith in that it lacks the volitional element. (Jas. 2:14 & 26). The test of living vital faith is that it reveals such reliance upon it that the individual acts it out. The teachings of both James and Paul are perfectly sound and in perfect harmony. The test of my faith in my friend who gives me a cheque for a sum of money is that I present it at the bank for payment without previous inquiry. I act upon the cheque. Action is the test of faith. The new faith of the new Testament converts stood the test; they acted upon it and continued their personal trust in God through Christ, and it never failed them. It brought crowns of early martyrdom to Stephen and James. It carried the apostles through many sore trials, imprisonments, stonings and shipwrecks to triumphant deaths. It resounds in the words of the Apostle of faith in memorable testimony: "In all things

we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### An Enlightened Consciousness of God.

We have already noticed that men were conscious of God and of his interest in them even before conversion. We are now to observe that this experience results in their consciousness being deepened, enlightened and enriched by continual divine grace. To the mind of the convert there comes a new and intuitive insight into the truth of man's relationship to God as it is revealed in Christ's life, and death and expressed in His teaching. This resulted in a new consciousness of spiritual relationship to God, expressed in many ways but chiefly through the metaphor of the family - God, the Father; the convert, the son of God. The convert becomes conscious of spiritual strength which renders him capable of doing the Divine will and obeying Divine desires and responding to Divine love, and of rendering a service to his fellow-man. Thus the convert acquires a new self-consciousness and a new self-determination through a deepened consciousness of God

and new insight into his relationship with God.

This new enlightenment is most evident in the case of Paul. Paul's conversion and his work as a missionary resulted in a very full conception of God's manifestation in Christ as the Saviour, and of the bestowal of the Spirit upon all converts. The explicit teaching of the New Testament about God's action among men and His love and goodness to men certainly owes much to Paul. He has grasped and recorded the purpose of God's manifestation in Christ and of the way of salvation, as no other New Testament writer has done. This exceptional personal conversion experience has naturally rendered it difficult for him to describe all he was delivered from and the heritage that has fallen to him. His conversion brought to him great satisfaction in a conception of the universal mission and end of Christianity. All peoples might find God and enjoy a similar relationship to Him. Paul, who had a keen interest in the destiny of human history, found illumination in Christianity. He confesses that not all intellectual desires are supplied, 'now we see through a glass darkly': but his deepest intellectual wants have been satisfied. He now knows how man can be justified, reconciled, received into the family of God. We shall note other phases of the enlightenment which came to him as a result of his inner revolution, as we make a further examination of the

results of conversion.

#### A Personal Fellowship.

The conversion experience was the inception of a personal relationship and fellowship with God in Christ and with fellow-converts. The fellowship of the family of God with Him through Christ or in Christ, and the social significance of human personality as God intended it to be in the family of God, are clearly revealed in the life of the early converts. The newly converted Christian was not to be an isolated hermit. He had surrendered none of his true personality and he was still a person in the fullest sense of the term. As such he had fellowship with fellow-Christians. This fellowship began at Pentecost and spread throughout the land as fast as the new life was taught and received. Men were won from among the Jews, and with conversion as an adaptable means, Gentiles were readily received into the fellowship. Many nations and classes and conditions furnished converts. The work of the apostle to the Gentiles and that of many other leaders of primitive Christian times is too well known to call for a detailed description. In a word it was all the result of conversion. The converts had a burning passion to see other souls possess the joy - the new life which was theirs. This fellowship was characterised by a unity of mind amongst the converts. "The multitude of them that believed

were of one heart and soul." (Acts 4:32). "We have the mind of Christ." (I. Cor. 3:16). In words of exhortation and encouragement, Paul wrote to those of the 'fellowship of the Spirit' that they 'stand fast in one spirit' and have 'the same love', be 'of one accord, of one mind.' (Phil. 1:27, 2:1). So complete was this unity of mind that at one time the Christians had fellowship not only in worship and sacrament but even in worldly goods and possessions (Acts 4:32f).

This fellowship of early Christianity is marked by two chief consequences as has already been intimated - in the first place, it accomplished the miraculous effect of uniting the Jews and Gentiles. Truly hatred had changed to Love. The impossible had been realized in them, and Jews sat with their enemies at the same table in the breaking of bread and in Christian fellowship.

It resulted, secondly, in the formation of the spiritual community - the church. They had realised first at Pentecost the importance and beneficial effects of being of one mind and one accord; they had discovered that the words of Jesus were true, and that "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst" was no mere fiction but a reality. They became aware that human personality can only reach its highest development and attainment in a social environment, where there is the 'mind of Christ' and where

the fellowship is in Christ - then are men united in mutual fellowship with fellow Christians and with God in Christ.

### Augmented Power.

Another resultant feature of this spiritual experience was the coming into possession of new power. The natural capacity of the convert of being and doing was augmented. The Spirit as it permeated their lives supplied the dynamic of the new life in Christ. They had received moral power. Paul exults in this new found strength, not as one who boasts, but as one conscious of new strength which has been supplied from an external source. "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:13). This is the same man who before said to us, "not what I hate, that I do." No! not the same man but a 'new creature'. The converts are conscious that the power which they find seeking expression through them is not their own (Acts 3:12, 8:10. I. Cor. 4:20. II. Cor. 4:7. Eph. 3:7). The will of the convert became the media for the expression of the will of God. The convert must become a part of the great executive process of the will of God among men. This was the secret of their marvellous endurance of hardship, persecution and martyrdom. The convert had power to live a life of constant testimony for Christ, and to lay his life on the altar of sacrifice for 'the new life,' if such

a sacrifice should be required. The power was given them in order that the will of God through Christ might be executed and that the gospel might reach the uttermost parts of the earth; that God's saving purpose for the salvation of mankind might be furthered. Some were more receptive and responsive to the power than others, and their lives come down to us under the names of Stephen, Philip, Peter, John, Paul and many others. Some appear to be endowed with a greater capacity of response and receptivity than others. But this must not lead us to overlook the fact that this power was available for all, and that it accompanied conversion in what was frequently spoken of as the coming of the Holy Spirit. "No reader of the New Testament can fail to be struck by the constant reiteration in different forms of the idea that the normal experience of a Christian at that epoch was enhanced power - "I can do all things" - an enhancement attributed by them to the operation in and through them of divine energy to which the community gave the name of the 'Spirit' - "Ye shall receive power".<sup>1</sup> The effect of the individual's conversion upon the life of the community can only be fully appreciated when we realise how quickly Christianity spread in its early days, and how many converts were made despite the severe persecution of the

1. 'The Psychology of Power' ('The Spirit') by J. Arthur Hadfield, p.111-112.

Pharisees at its beginning. The high principles of the Christians and their moral fervour permeated the community and left an influence. So great was this that the leaders were in constant demand and apparently many calls were made upon their services which they were unable to answer.

However sudden and revolutionary were the conversions of some of the primitive Christians, however miraculous some of the phenomena which accompanied them, however marked their resultant characteristics may have been, they were none the less permanent and genuine. Although at times we find some teaching a Christ of contention, although Demas and others seem to have forsaken the cause, there is no evidence of many who had allied themselves with Christianity and had begun the Christian life through the conversion experience, turning back to their former life and completely renouncing Christianity. At times there arose certain factions, some desired to follow Paul, some inclined toward Peter's teaching. There was at other times great concern over rites such as circumcision which troubled certain of the churches. Some believers appear to have become entangled in what orthodoxy to-day would call heresy, but there is no definite evidence that any great number of converts turned again to their idols or their sins and settled down to a satisfied existence in their former life. The change which had come to them appears to



have been a permanent one, and the truth which they had received seems to have left an indelible impression upon their hearts; their conversion had left them with a firm conviction and an unshakable assurance in Christianity, so that they did not readily turn again to their old ways of life. Mistakes might be made, but men realising them were drawn again to the miraculous personality of the One who had first appealed to them as Saviour. Paul makes frequent reference to prevalent heathen sin which sometimes re-asserted itself among the Gentile converts. But even these do not stand in the way of the converts striving on in the Christian life to a triumphant victory. These sins must have given Paul anxiety of mind, if we may judge from the frequent mention of fornication, of uncleanness, and the like, and the warnings he gives against them. They are remnants of the old life and may often have persisted, perhaps because the Gentile converts were not always able immediately to acquire the Christian code of morals. But the point is that there is no record that the new life was being abandoned because it was not yielding that which had been anticipated. There is no sign of disappointment among the new converts. The evidence is rather that the new life with its faith, fellowship and power is sufficient to produce that degree of stability among these Gentiles, as well as among Jewish converts, which still

excites the marvel of the Christian world. The results of man's personal experience at the inception of the Christian life cannot be measured in the record of the new Testament, but have been sweeping on with more or less interruption and under varying circumstances from that day to this.

The chief difference between the results of new Testament conversions and those of the psychologists' examination is that new Testament conversions are characterised by a definiteness which does not belong to the majority of modern conversions. This is undoubtedly due to the circumstances under which the conversions took place. In New Testament conversions there was a proximity to great events, to the manifestation and revelation of God through Jesus Christ and the coming of the Spirit. The converts lacked the knowledge of Christianity given through the various means of Christian education used to-day. As a result the New Testament convert came into contact with the teaching of primitive Christianity as something new and different. To the Jews it was different from the rigour of the law; to the Gentiles it was a new religion. They were also conscious of proximity to the historical Jesus. His life and death and the events following it were attested by those who were still living among them. This definiteness is expressed in terms of more distinct spiritual and moral values resulting from the

experience. Too much emphasis must not be laid upon this point, for it is quite evident that the most definite records of New Testament conversions are those of the leading personalities of primitive Christianity; if these alone were to be compared with classic examples of conversion examined by psychologists, no doubt the difference in the degree of definiteness of results would not be so apparent.

We have already noted that there is a difference of opinion between James and Leuba as to the results of conversion upon the individual life. Leuba takes the position that genuine Christian conversion does change the man so that he is different from even the normally righteous man. James takes the opposite view. He deals at length with what he calls "the fruits of life." That we may have his point of view clearly before us we shall allow him to state it in his own words. "Well, and how is it with these fruits?" he asks. "If we except the class of preeminent saints of whom the names illumine history, and consider only the usual run of saints, the shopkeeping church-members, and ordinary youthful or middle-aged recipients of instantaneous conversion, whether at revivals or in spontaneous course of methodistic growth, you will probably agree that no splendour worthy of a wholly supernatural creature fulgurates from them, or sets them apart from the mortals who have never experienced that

favour. were it true that a suddenly converted man as such is as Edwards says, of an entirely different kind from a natural man, partaking as he does directly of Christ's substance, there surely ought to be some exquisite class-mark, some distinctive radiance attaching even to the lowliest specimen of this genus, to which no one of us could remain insensible, and which so far as it went would prove him more excellent than even the most highly gifted among mere natural men. But notoriously there is no radiance. Converted men as a class are indistinguishable from natural men; some natural men even excel some converted men in their fruits; and no one ignorant of doctrinal theology could guess by mere every-day inspection of the 'accidents' of the two groups of persons before him, that their substance differed as much as divine differs from human substance."<sup>1</sup>

Surely this is one of the most unscientific pieces of work which Professor James has done in all his writings on the subject of conversion. What right has anyone, who is professing to be doing scientific work, to exclude some of the data? Take his opening sentence in the quotation - "If we except the class of preeminent saints"... "You will probably agree that no splendour worthy of a wholly supernatural creature fulgurates from them," i.e. from converted people.

<sup>1</sup>. James' Varieties, p.237f.

But why exclude a part of the evidence? why are these preëminent saints to be forbidden consideration? Are they not a product of conversion? Are they not leaders in the Christian era? Can we understand the ordinary multitude which is a product of Christian conversion better by omitting the leaders? why should this method be used here and go unchallenged under the guise of scientific procedure, when it is most unscientific. Could art, or literature or architecture be judged by products which are second and third rate and those which are without rate at all? What right has James to compare a converted shopkeeper with a natural man of highest intellectual and moral qualities. Is he not most justly to be compared with the natural man that he was before the conversion experience, or with one of the class of natural men to which he belonged before conversion: James has, it seems to me, vitiated the whole comparison by excluding the 'preëminent saints'. Had James taken a typical class of 'preëminent saints' and compared them with a class of preëminent natural men, a typical class of converted shopkeepers and compared them with a typical class of natural men who were shopkeepers, a typical class of men converted from lowest depths of sin and degradation and compared them with a typical class of unconverted men who were still in the degradation of their sinful lives, then he

might have arrived at a scientific conclusion of value. But to say that some "natural men even excel some converted men in their fruits" is not only unfair but most unscientific. In fact his comparison from the point of fairness and science is useless.

However, James is willing just after the passage quoted, to admit that there is an "extraordinary momentousness of the fact of his conversion to the individual himself." And then follows a statement which is quite true to conversion. "Who knows how much less ideal still the lives of these spiritual grubs and earthworms, these Crumps and Stigginses might have been, if such poor grace as they have received had never touched them at all." This gives us what James really believed more nearly than his intended scientific comparison. He believed men were really different after conversion, but he appears reluctant to admit it.

## Chapter VII.

## Final Problems.

the data of the phenomena of conversion are now before us; we have described the general nature, the need, the antecedents and the results of the experience both from the teaching of the new testament and that of psychology. We have made comparisons and have indicated similarities and discussed divergences. It has been found that the outstanding difference is psychology's use of the subconscious as a causal explanation and all that is involved by its use.<sup>1</sup> It is, in other words, the general tendency of psychology to explain the unusual and striking transformations of character, the change of intellect, disposition and attitude of mind by referring them all to the subconscious. Perhaps the most recent scientific treatment of conversion by a prominent psychologist is that of Professor Pratt, in which he says, "Many entire cases of conversion therefore, and many of the details of all conversion are to be explained by familiar facts. There are

1. The use of the subconscious as a full and adequate, causal explanation of conversion has been the basis of some recent conclusions. Among those which have received attention, is the explanation that conversion is the result of 'hypnotism', and another, closely allied with it, that conversion is best explained as the result of 'auto-suggestion'. The compass of this thesis does not permit us to deal adequately with all the problems which it suggests. Hence we are compelled to refrain from discussing and criticizing these conclusions.

some aspects of conversion, however, not so easily disposed of. The transformation is sometimes so sudden as to be startling and so complete as to suggest some physiological change in the organism. There is no doubt that if the subconscious be given a sufficiently wide interpretation, psychology is justified in looking to it for the explanation of these striking phenomena."<sup>1</sup> It is cases of conversion such as those described in Begbie's 'Twice Born Men' and many other similar ones, which have driven both scientific psychologists and interested, practical theologians to search for causal explanations outside 'the field of ordinary mental occurrences.' Great caution must be exercised, however, by all working in this field. The experience through which a person begins the Christian life and enters into fellowship with God must not be dealt with hastily or summarily. Sweeping and meaningless conclusions must not be put forth to a gullible and often uninformed public. The subconscious, subliminal and unconscious are terms used, to-day, by many with a laxity and evidence of lack of understanding which is regrettable.<sup>2.3.</sup> Psychologists and others have seized upon

1. Religious Consciousness. 1920. J.B. Pratt, p. 160 abridged.

2. A certain psycho-analyst has said of this laxity, "The word 'subconscious', so important as to be almost a key, has been twisted by popular usage to mean almost anything beyond the pale of ordinary experience." 'Abnormal Psychology', J.H. Coriat, p. 3. 3. Recently a well-known teacher of philosophy gave warning as follows:—"The looseness with which the word 'unconscious' is at present used is a psychological scandal of the first magnitude." Professor C.D. Broad, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, p. 173.



these terms as one does upon a friend in time of need. As plastic clay in their hands this region has become both a storehouse and a workshop; moral transformations occur here; prayers are answered and man unconsciously communes with his higher self under the deluded conception that it is God with whom he is in such close relation. A certain type of evangelical theology informs the listener that there are two of us and that the ominous shade is ever present although we are unaware of it. Nor has fiction escaped - the novelist has seized upon 'it' as provender for an ever hungry public. Thus the subconscious life, subconscious mind or subconscious self has become the subject of some most unusual and fantastic descriptions. . We must here take notice of this, since science or certain branches of psychological science are largely responsible. The first highly metaphorical description ~~with reference~~ to conversion is easily traced to James.

What has taken place makes it clear that we are dealing with a subject of great importance. What is the value of the subconscious in conversion? The answer to be given to the question proposed will plainly depend upon the answer to the logically prior question: what is the subconscious? This question is not an easy one, because no view or theory of the matter commands universal approval even among psychologists, to say nothing of philosophers and theologians.

Every theory has its intricacies and subtleties, upon which the various groups or psychological schools hold different views. However, there is general agreement that more exists in the psychical realm than that which is in evidence at the conscious focus. The subconscious contains potential conscious material. Just what the form of this potential conscious material is has been variously interpreted, and lack of space forbids us entering into a discussion of it. But the stored-up memories; the apperceptive systems of ideas; the habits, disposition, attitudes, interests and affections - in short, that which we commonly call character - are there in some mode of existence or persistence. Our subconsciousness at any given time may be described as being all that mental being which persists outside the consciousness at any particular time. The subconscious is potential consciousness. What exists in the storehouse is the deposit of consciousness, enjoying a greater or lesser degree of discriminating awareness. Thus the subconsciousness is largely acquired.<sup>2</sup>

1. "I shall use the term 'unconscious', then, to signify something experimental in character; that is to say, something of which the subject of the experience may also have been aware; something which, in appropriate conditions, may (or may again) come to awareness; something, however, which is not now a part of awareness." 'Mind', F. Aveling, vol. XXI. p. 424.

2. "It is well to emphasise the fact that subconsciousness is not an endowment but an incidental acquisition, due to strain of voluntary attention. It is a by-product of a determinedly self-conscious life. No infant has a subconsciousness; no adult is without one." 'The Meaning of God in Human Experience', W. E. Hocking, p. 27.

Regarding it in this way we see at once that it is our own true product, a result of our former conscious life.<sup>1</sup> Thus the subconscious as potential consciousness becomes to us an understandable, reasonable and workable hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> We come to regard it not as another self or mind in the background or below our consciousness forcing upon it certain products of its own process, but as our own. No matter what further interpretation we may place upon the subconscious as regards its powers of process, we can rest assured it has nothing to work with except that which we have permitted it to have.

We return then to our original question, what is the value of the subconscious in conversion? Sudden cases, psychology is generally agreed, always involve subconscious influences. The most widely accepted theory is that ideas, emotions enter the 'subconscious region' through the ordinary channels of the individual mind. And reposing in the

1. Prof. Stout has clearly described the subconscious as an organised system of conditions which have been formed in and through bygone conscious experience. From an article in Hibbert Journal, vol. II, p. 47.

2. In our consideration it is well to keep before us the fact stated by a recent writer on religious psychology: "Our method, therefore, must be one of tentative exploration; we must form an estimate of the subconscious from those occasional messages which come to us from it, and we must at all times remember that our results are largely hypothetical." Adventures of the Soul, K. J. Saunders, p. 7. In the same vein writes F. Aveling, "Where the laws have been formulated it will be found that certain hypothetical elements have been necessarily introduced to complete and round off the whole after the manner of a science." Mind, vol. XXI, p. 425.

subconscious they are forgotten. Here a process of 'incubation' or 'germination', occurs. They are slowly associating themselves as emotional complexes and tendencies to action; a gradual transformation of 'tastes' and values is taking place; when the day of ripening or complete incubation has arrived, the whole complex rises into consciousness and dominates it and the man discovers that he is a new creature; that he has been so completely changed that he loves that which once he hated, and that he has no desire for that which he formerly craved.

Though psychologists are fairly agreed about referring these cases of sudden conversion to this sort of subconscious process, they are far from united on the interpretation of the 'subconscious action' or process. Some (e.g. Coe and Starbuck) employ the physiological explanation or the theory of unconscious mechanism of the nervous system, as it is sometimes called. The terms 'unconscious cerebration' and 'brain-thinking' are used as terms of explanation. The meaning of these terms is not clear, and the theory has been convincingly refuted many times. James and his disciples seem to regard the subconscious as a co-consciousness. This involves a doubling of the stream of thought, 'either as a normal condition or as an incipiently abnormal disaggregation of consciousness due to emotional excitement.' But this theory

does not seem to account for all the facts. One question is pertinent: why is man able under Christian conversion to come into a state as regards his moral character - habits, attitudes, tastes and dispositions - and his relation to his fellow man, to say nothing of a new relation to God which he is able to accomplish by no other means? This question has not been answered in an adequate manner by those psychologists who maintain that conversion is a natural process and nothing more.

Treating the subject experientially and not philosophically, I feel that the subconscious does have a value in conversion which must not be overlooked. Regarded as a reservoir or storehouse, suggestion has the power of releasing ideas and feeling into conscious activity. In the normal experience the truth which is pressed upon the mind antecedent to conversion the ideas of sin and the new life, enter the subconscious through the conscious and from the subconscious there come ideas and feelings (or, as some might say, that which produces them) from the accumulated association of the past to reinforce the truth and give it converting power!<sup>1</sup> The memories

1. In addition to these theories of interpretation, is the one advanced by F.W.H. Myers in his book 'Human Personality'. This theory is that each individual may be really a multiple-personality. There are different subliminal strata - all conscious of each other. We are a number of selves or entities. This is different from the general theory of the subconscious and should not be confused with it.

of the past from childhood to the present moment may urgently make their way into the consciousness of the individual even as the revival of past experiences come into the consciousness of a drowning man - as a panoramic consciousness. Psychologists have been too prone to overlook the possibilities of the conscious process as it is aided by its important ally, the subconscious. The testimony of a keen philosopher and psychologist, who has also had many years of observational experience as a minister, says, "Most conversions that take place in mature life are caused by this uprush out of the past to reinforce and decide the duty of the movement."<sup>1</sup> The real value of the subconscious in conversion is as an ally to the conscious. Conversion does not really take place in the subconscious, as many psychologists have maintained. The uprush from the subconscious is not a conversion-complex, except as it is a stream of associations coming so fast into consciousness, at a period of mental and emotional excitement, that they are not discriminated as such. There is no uncanny process going on beneath or outside the consciousness of the individual. A man is never converted against his will. He may have been converted against what might be regarded as a determination of his previous will, but not against what was

1. The Psychology of Religion by Jas. H. Snowden, p. 166.

his will at the moment of his conversion. The will is supreme but not impregnable. The intellect and emotions have the capacity to bring the will to decision and to maintain it at that state of determination. If man did not have this capacity, conversion would be impossible. He also has power to resist the appeal which the truth may make to him, so that he cannot be converted against his conscious will. But if the presentation of the truth and aid of the subconscious allies present a strong enough front, so that he is convinced of the value of the truth, then his consciousness is ready and willing to accept the new ideal, and genuine conversion takes place as a decision of the will to surrender the old life, to accept the new life and to act in accordance with it. Thereafter, the actual life becomes largely that which was the ideal before conversion. Will such an explanation account for the facts in all normal cases of genuine conversion? I think it will, providing emotional excitement be clearly distinguished from conversion. Take the extreme and difficult case of M. Ratisbonne,<sup>1</sup> the free-thinking French Jew; the case James considered most difficult to explain. The occurrence of his

1. All the data clearly indicate that this case, like many others quoted by James, is a pathological case, and as such should come under the treatment of abnormal psychology and not be treated under the psychology of normal conversion. However, I prefer to admit it and use it as a test case.

vision is no doubt explained by the previous presentation of the truth to him by his friend. The truth had made such an impression that he had repeated the prayer given to him. The vision became to him the added evidence necessary to move his will to decision; this decision of his will was a conscious process following the vision and was made some time after he regained consciousness from the swoon. Memory of the vision and the emotional state which it produced remained and had its effect upon the man's will and finally produced conversion. But there was no conversion until the man effected and maintained his decision to accept Christianity as he understood it. Psychology has been so completely taken up with the uprush from the subconscious reservoir or storehouse and the incubation and germination occurring there, that it has overlooked the real conscious conversion process. Until faith becomes conscious, what dynamic effect will it have in the conscious life of the individual?

Psychology's failure to analyse and explain the process fully is no doubt due in part to the data at hand. The convert has so often mistaken and described the emotional excitement as conversion, that the psychologist too has mistaken it for the full psychological process of conversion.

As Professor Mackintosh<sup>1</sup> has clearly pointed out, there

1. 'Some Aspects of Christian Belief.' H.R. Mackintosh, p.216f.



is no such state in an individual mind as 'unconscious faith', and a man cannot be an 'unconscious christian'. A man may have all the outward characteristics of a christian, but unless he has conscious faith in Christ and has decided to live in fellowship with God through him, he is not a christian in the generally accepted sense of the term.

If it could be proved (as some psychologists have undertaken to prove) that conversion may take place within the subconscious and that it may force itself upon the consciousness this would raise at least two problems. First, the consciousness would not be the last court of judgment but would be liable to dictatorial domination from the subconscious; it would be made subservient to the subconsciousness. It might be said in reply that the subconscious is as much a part of the self as the conscious. This does not help much if we desire to maintain the unity of the self and the supremacy of the consciousness in normal individuals. The situation is this; we can accept no view of the subconscious activity which will make it possible for the subconscious to force upon the conscious anything which is out of harmony with the self in its conscious state, or which would revolutionise the attitude, dispositions and habits of the self without the conscious permission of the self. It is within the sphere of consciousness that we control the process of attention, so that we can

throw it from one object to another and the associations begin to form around that which holds the centre of consciousness until it be sufficient to move the will. In some cases what holds the centre of consciousness might consist largely of emotion, in others intellect might predominate; and in either case it would be a conscious process. If in conversion we regard the subconscious as an ally, the most valuable ally and servant any conscious mind possesses, then this problem is not insoluble.

The other problem is this: If we accept the theory that the whole process of conversion is worked out in the subconscious and presented to consciousness, then hasty, popular, would-be philosophers, and non-religious psychologists may reasonably maintain that man's religious experience is only an illusion. Man has been deluded into believing that he was in touch with a God who was a loving Father, but now he awakens to the fact that he has only been in communication with his own higher self in the subconscious region and that it has responded to his petitions and desires. The Christian has regarded his religious life as a fellowship with God in Christ which begins in conversion. But he discovers that his fellowship has been within himself, with his other and higher self', to use the language of some writers. Man then is only hypostasising as God what is interior to himself or, as

we might say, his inner self. Leuba has boldly stated the point as follows:- "The danger from historical and literary criticism is forgotten in the presence of psychological questions: Are communion with God, conversion, mystic revelation, etc., to be explained entirely according to natural psychological laws? If the answer be yes, how then legitimize beliefs in a personal God supposed to produce these results in answer to petition or to desires?"<sup>1</sup> Professor Leuba's answer is yes, and he says that he cannot bring himself to believe in a personal God.<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach, it may be remembered, teaches an even more radical and negative doctrine. Man believes in God because he is a creature in possession of imagination and feeling, and has an instinct for happiness. In short, man's god or gods are a product of his instinctive thirst and desires. If man were without desires, he would have no religion and no God.<sup>3</sup> But these psychologists and philosophers have overlooked the ultimate origin of the religious desires of man. The question is, even if man's conversion is entirely explained by natural psychological laws,

1. A Psychological Study of Religion, 1912, J.H. Leuba, p. 212.

2. This psychologist states his position as follows: "I cannot persuade myself that divine personal beings, be they primitive gods or the Christian Father, have more than a subjective existence." 'The Psychological Study of Religion', J.H. Leuba, p. 10.

3. 'Werke', Ludwig Feuerbach. Bd. VIII p. 257-258. Quoted from 'Christian Experience and Psychological Process', by Rouse and Miller.

does that exclude God's operation in the process? I cannot see that it does. Have we ceased to regard God as the Creative and Intelligent Force and Source behind the evolutionary process of the physical universe because we know something of its laws? Have we not an enhanced conception of God because we have the evolutionary explanation? Law is meaningless without that which has made it law and maintains it as law. God is a Spirit working in the minds of men, inspiring faith and love when they respond to Him, cleansing and purifying the psychical realm. If, as even psychology admits, man's powers have been weakened and perverted; if subordinate attitudes and dispositions have become dominant; if instincts which should have been inhibited have been rampant, so that thoughts, feelings and volitions have become distorted and diverted and man cannot co-operate with God and have fellowship with Him but lives in alienation and often in defiance of Him, cannot God accomplish the rearrangement, readjustment and regeneration according to the psychological laws which prevail in man's mind? Will it be any less a divine, and (if you choose to employ the term) supernatural act on the part of the Spirit if it be done in accord with psychological law? Who set the mind of man to work according to psychological principles except God? Someone has well said, "God is all-operative love and man's whole equipment is His gift." This view of

God does not violate or vitiate either God's immanence or his transcendence. What God accomplishes in the inner man will never perhaps be fully understood, but need this hinder us from believing, through a firm personal conviction or faith, substantiated by personal experience in conversion and fellowship with God, that he can and does influence the mind and operate within the psychic realm? I see no reason to limit God to either the subconscious or the conscious sphere of the psychic realm. The human soul is open to God that he may conduct his offices of beneficent influence and operation known to theology as regeneration. God has no exclusive affinity for the conscious as contrasted with the subconscious. But if religion affects the whole of man, as we believe it does, the regenerative act of God must affect the whole of man, including the subconscious. We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our 'heart, soul, mind and strength' (Mk.12:30). How can we make the response to God except as our whole being is open to the touch of God? Just as the physical scientist may fail to see God back of the evolutionary process, so the psychologist may fail to see God in the psychological process of conversion.

Our interpretation of the subconscious and conscious avoids predicating of the subconscious a moral activity which the known facts do not warrant. The data are entirely too

inadequate to justify the hypothesis that man subconsciously and without any attentive or discriminating awareness, accomplishes a process which changes his entire life, as the inception of the Christian life does.

Psychology then has brought us nothing absolutely new except a fuller understanding, in some respects, of how man can and does respond to the initiative of the Spirit of God. Some psychologists have rightly despaired of analysing the divine element in the experience. One of them summarises his conclusion as follows: "In dealing with the subject of religious conversion, its very nature compels us to treat it incompletely. However much we may believe in the divine element in conversion and in the religious life generally, it must remain an unknown quantity, and it can only be judged by the apparent effects upon the persons experiencing it".<sup>1</sup> To the same effect Professor H. R. Mackintosh writes, "According to James, regeneration is a mental process that can be traced and analysed and explained by the investigator. It is possible, by means of circumstantial research and inference, to describe with exactness how a Christian comes into being. And this faith utterly denies."<sup>2</sup> We may study conversion, which is the response of man to God's initiative,

1. The Psychological Phenomena, A.B. Cutten, p.  
2. Op. cit. p. 234.

but we cannot determine just now God regenerates the soul of man any more than we can explain in an ultimate way how God creates life. We know He has created, by what has been created; and we know He has regenerated from the effects which we have realised in our personal experience and the apparent results which we observe in others.

To our own personal faith and conviction may be added that of the New Testament converts and the Christians since the first century. Paul reassures his churches with this causal explanation of his conversion, "it was the good pleasure of God ....to reveal His son in me" (Gal.1:15,16). The assurance of his regeneration rested on the fact that he recognised and knew God as Saviour through Christ. Thus we confidently maintain that to the principle of conversion as taught and exemplified in the New Testament, there belongs a universal validity which is not being discounted but is rather being continually verified as man searches for truth.